

THIS WE BELIEVE



Teachings of the
Church of God (Seventh Day)

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Published and Distributed by
BIBLE ADVOCATE PRESS
Post Office Box 33677
Denver, Colorado 80233-0677
cog7.org/publications

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Cover photo: *designpics.com*

First Printing 2012

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 978-0-9850808-0-8



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Post Office Box 33677
Denver, Colorado 80233-0677
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Preface

Since its inception, the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) has maintained an open creed — one that can be (and has been) amended with the passage of time. Our Statement of Faith represents our current understanding of these twelve fundamental doctrines.

As a body of believers, we strive for continued growth in understanding and wisdom. Thus, our beliefs will continue to evolve as our horizons broaden. At the same time, our beliefs are securely grounded in what Scripture proclaims about God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our current Statement of Faith was accepted as the Church's official doctrinal position at the 2006 meeting of our North American Ministerial Council (NAMC) in Overland Park, Kansas. During that meeting the NAMC called for the writing of a book-length explanation of our newly adopted Statement of Faith. This represented the first time in our denomination's history that our ministerial body undertook such a project.

Background

Pursuant to the 2006 council mentioned above, five men accepted the appointment to serve on a writing committee for this project: Elders Calvin Burrell, Roy Marrs, Max Morrow, Antonio Vega, and Richard Wiedenheft. When Elder Wiedenheft died in 2007, two oth-

er ministers — Elders John Lemley and Israel Steinmetz — accepted the invitation to join the writing committee. Elder Robert Coulter, chairman of that 2006 council, was a strong proponent of this book project from the start and made a large literary contribution to it.

Over the course of the next three-and-one-half years, these men worked together diligently to produce manuscripts that expounded upon, and presented the biblical basis for, our Statement of Faith. In general, one or two men would take responsibility for writing the first draft of a chapter, after which the rest of the committee would provide feedback and recommendations. By the time a second or third draft was completed, it was impossible to attribute a given chapter to a single writer. Each was, to a large degree, the product of the committee as a whole.

Upon completion of all chapters, the writing committee sought feedback from the entire NAMC. Further improvements were made based upon recommendations from many ministers over the course of nearly a year. The book was approved for final editing at the 2010 NAMC meeting in Glen Eyrie, Colorado.

Thus, five years of work have gone into the creation of this book. But those five years represent a mere fraction of the lifetimes of study and wisdom that informed its content as numerous ministers gave prayerful consideration to its words.

Scope and purpose

It is worthwhile to clarify the scope and purpose of this book at the outset. To do so, we should say something about its intended audience, its treatment of alternative views, and its intended use. By sharing these explicitly, we hope that this book will enjoy the best possible use by those who read it.

In a project such as this, it is a challenge to clearly identify one's intended audience. We want our writing to reach as broad an audience as possible, but we realize that we are still making a number of assumptions about our audience. We assume that they share our conviction that Scripture is the only authoritative rule of faith and practice for the body of Christ. Thus we do not attempt to defend Scripture

against the sacred writings of other faiths, nor do we appeal to creeds, church tradition, or other extra-biblical sources as a foundation for our belief.

We also assume that our audience has a keen interest in the study of Scripture and desire to learn more about our denomination's beliefs. We assume a moderate level of biblical and theological literacy that allows readers to understand the statements and arguments that we will put forward. Our intended audience includes not only those who agree with our understanding of these doctrines but also those who disagree. And of course, we desire to speak to the individual who is undecided and seeking further understanding.

With a picture of our intended audience in mind, we can speak briefly to the issue of our interaction with other viewpoints within the Christian faith. We recognize that Christianity is marked by diversity in understanding and doctrine. Our primary concern was not to *argue for* our beliefs or *argue against* the beliefs of others, but rather to clearly explain why we believe what we believe in light of Scripture. There is no sustained effort to disprove our detractors, or even to convince the skeptics. Rather, we desire to clearly explain what our Statement of Faith means and leave the convicting, teaching, and sanctifying work to the Holy Spirit.

Our desire is that this book will serve many purposes. For the interested researcher in historical and religious studies, it represents a meaningful snapshot of one denomination's understanding of Scripture. For the fellow Christian who represents a different denomination, it serves as a means of dialogue and information regarding our distinctive beliefs and practices. For those within our denomination, it serves to clarify, inform, encourage, and strengthen us in our shared convictions regarding Scripture. Among other things, it can be used as a textbook in our training programs, an aid for individual and group Bible studies, and a reliable source of information regarding our denomination's doctrinal positions.

On this last point, we should note that while what is written here has been reviewed and approved for publication by the Church's ministry (NAMC), only the *Statement of Faith* has been embraced as our official doctrinal position. We recognize that a great deal more could be said about each of these doctrines. A book of this length

only scratches the surface of each of these topics, opening the door for continued study, discussion, and learning. Countless Scriptures and lines of explanation could be brought forward to explain and expound upon these beliefs. Thus, one of the book's purposes is to serve as a stimulant for thought, prayer, discussion, study, and growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord.

A word of thanks

Writing theology is never easy. Writing it by committee is an even greater challenge. The process humbled us, knit our hearts together, and reminded us daily of the need for unity in the Spirit and the presence of the fruit and gifts of the Spirit in our lives. We want to thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us as we worked together. And we want to thank the final review committee and the entire NAMC for their partnership in this important and historic task.

The success of this project to this point and any hope for its future success depend entirely upon the grace of God. As a committee we acknowledge total reliance upon Him and thank Him for the strength, wisdom, and unity He has given us throughout. Any truth in this book we attribute entirely to Jesus Christ, who is the truth, and to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Anything in error we attribute to ourselves, the weakness of our flesh, and the limitation of our knowledge. In this way we desire that any good that comes of this book will be to the glory of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Above all, we desire this book to be a tool in God's hand as He advances His kingdom in the world. May all who read it enjoy the blessings that we experienced in writing it.

Writing Committee

Calvin Burrell, chairman

John Lemley

Roy Marrs

Max Morrow

Israel Steinmetz

Antonio Vega

Richard Wiedenheft (deceased)

Statement of Faith 1

The Holy Bible

The Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is God's inspired Word. Inerrant in its original writing, the Bible is the only authoritative and infallible rule of faith and conduct for humanity.

The Bible is a collection of sixty-six books written by more than thirty men under the inspiration of God's Spirit over a period of nearly 1,500 years. This remarkable library of history, law, poetry, wisdom, gospel, letters, essays, and prophecies constitutes the Holy Scriptures of the Christian faith. The Bible forms the foundation of the Christian faith and church.

The word *Bible* derives from the Greek *biblos*, meaning "books." Within it the following words are used in reference to itself: "the books" (Daniel 9:2); "the holy scriptures" (Romans 1:2; 2 Timothy 3:15); "Scripture" (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20); "oracles of God" (Romans 3:2); and "word of righteousness" (Hebrews 5:13).

The object of our faith is not the Bible itself. A good book cannot save us, no matter how inspired and inspiring. Through the Bible we acquire the basis for faith to accept, believe, confess, and demonstrate by obedience that Jesus Christ is the true Savior and Lord. Thus the object of biblical faith is the holy and loving God who is revealed throughout Scripture and perfectly in Jesus Christ. In Him alone do we find the salvation that we need and long for (John 5:39, 40).

As the Lord Jesus Christ is the living Word of God (John 1:1-3, 14), so the Bible is God's Word written. As inspired by and rightly interpreted through the Holy Spirit, the Bible is the only reliable authority for the faith and practice of God's people.

Old and New

This Holy Book of books is divided into two main sections. The first section records the faith and sacred writings of God's covenant people in the ages prior to the coming of the Messiah. These Scriptures, written primarily in the Hebrew language, are recognized by the Christian church as the Old Testament. Its thirty-nine books are in three categories: the five books of Moses, or Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy); the Prophets (former prophets, Joshua through the Kings — commonly called books of history — and latter prophets, Isaiah through Malachi); and the Writings (Ruth, the Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, and Daniel). This division has been widely

accepted among the Jews since before Jesus' time and was acknowledged by Him in Luke 24:44.

The second section of twenty-seven books contains the sacred writings that are unique to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is known as the New Testament, believed to be written in Greek. The New Testament is less than one-third the length of the Old.

These two sections together form a unit that furnishes the written foundation for our faith. Each was revealed as the Word of God, and neither may be discarded without doing damage to the full revelation of God's will for man. Both Testaments show us God's election of Israel to dispense His word through prophets and bring through her lineage the incarnate Word to save our souls and complete the dispensation of His Word through the apostles (Hebrews 1:1, 2).

The central theme of the Bible is God's message of salvation by grace through faith in His Son Jesus. In the Old Testament, this theme was announced through types and prophecies. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ the Son of God (Matthew 16:13-16) becomes historical reality as true man (Mark 6:1-4). Through the Scriptures God requires faith and obedience on the part of the reader, and provides for the same (Romans 10:17; Philippians 2:13).

The Old Testament is God's Word indeed, although not His final Word. Those who read this first section, the Hebrew Scriptures, should continue in the words of our Lord Jesus and His apostles (New Testament), for it is in the latter that God's grace and truth come to their fullest illumination and finest expression (John 1:17).

In the Old Testament, the New is concealed; in the New Testament, the Old is revealed. We must take care not to separate what God has joined — namely, the older and newer Scriptures that are combined in the Holy Bible.

Notes

Why we believe . . .

We live in a time when the Bible has many critics. In all walks of life — even in the church — people have concluded that our Scriptures are not what we have claimed and are not to be trusted.

The attacks on the Bible are not new, of course. Ever since it was first spoken or written, God's Word has been exposed to public doubt and ridicule. Voltaire, the noted eighteenth century French infidel, predicted that the Christian faith based on the Scriptures would soon disappear. Within twenty years of his death, the Geneva Bible Society used his house and his printing presses to publish more copies of the Bible. In spite of many efforts to the contrary, the Bible became and continues to be the world's most-printed, most-distributed book — still the bestseller!

Reasons for reading and believing the Bible are always interlaced with faith. Still, Christians should be familiar with some of the logical bases for embracing the Scriptures and their messages. Here are several reasons to believe the Bible.

- Its historical nature. The Bible differs from the sacred writings of some other faiths in that it is based on actual history, not on mythology or pseudo-history. Both the Hebrew faith (Judaism) and Christianity are interwoven with the flow of history — from ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt down through Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Interlinks between biblical accounts and otherwise recorded events are many. They lead us to affirm that Christianity is a historically accurate faith and that the Bible is a reliable historical account of the nation of Israel and its interaction with other nations.

- Its archaeological evidence. The testimony of ancient evidence recently unearthed in Palestine and the Middle East confirms much of the Bible's account. Perhaps the most impressive of this evidence is found in the thousands of early manuscripts and old copies of Scripture that have either been unearthed or retrieved from other sources. Repeatedly claims of error in sacred writ have been silenced by the spades of archaeologists.

- Its many manuscripts. No other ancient book has so many documents attesting to its authenticity and integrity as does the Bible. With new evidence continuing to arise, it has passed the tests of tex-

tual criticism. Variations found in the text among ancient manuscripts mostly involve secondary matters and do not affect the essence of their message.

- Its internal consistency. Although written in diverse genres over more than a millennium by close to forty authors, the books of the Bible form an amazingly agreeable unit. While some skeptics make it their business to list what they see as the Bible's contradictions, those who believe find perfect harmony in the Bible's purpose and content. Its big picture shows the truth about God, about man, about sin, about salvation and eternal life. Its primary aim is to reveal the will of God for humanity. For these purposes, the Bible is a perfectly good and reliable book. It may never have been intended to provide scientific data or historical detail in the way that some expect.

- Its survival. The Bible has stood the test of time. It not only survived every attempt to bury, banish, or burn it and the gospel message it contains but also actually thrived under such efforts. The benevolent influence of the Bible-believing church upon the world's peoples for nearly 2,000 years points to the indestructibility of Scripture. Jesus said that His words would never pass away even though heaven and earth would (Luke 21:33) — a prophecy that remains uncontradicted.

- Its relevance and realism. Readers of Scripture are often surprised by how down-to-earth the Bible is. Head-on, it addresses the real issues of life and death, war and peace, love and sex, home and family, wise men and fools. Even the sins of the Bible's faith heroes are not protected or glamorized in the glare of God's truth. A book of such diverse and terrestrial focus might not benefit if it did not offer release and solution to humanity's massive problems. But it does. The life stories of millions, dead and alive, provide evidence of the powerful and pragmatic benefits of the Bible. It works. Consider all those transformed lives — including our own!

Notes

- Its predictions and promises. Sprinkled throughout the Bible from beginning to end is a stream of texts that speak of what's ahead in the human experience. Some of these take the form of prophecies about the future, like those Old Testament texts that anticipate the first coming of Messiah or the New Testament texts that predict His return. Perhaps more of these, however, are expressed as God's indicators of what people can expect if they trust and obey Him now, or if they don't. In tracking these texts and observing their outcomes, we are greatly assured by the reliability of God's prophetic and promissory Word. In so very many instances, He has already done what He said He would do. This creates confidence and trust that every promise and prophecy in the Book will someday come to pass.

Inspiration

Thus the Bible, and the Bible alone, stands as the written authority for the faith of Christians. Indeed, it is the inspired Word of God. It came directly from God and was revealed to humanity through His servants (2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:20, 21).

Rather than a book of mere human wisdom or man's best views about God, the Bible contains what God wants us to know about Himself and how men and women can walk well-pleasing before Him. The Bible is divine revelation, not mere human reasoning.

How was this Word from God revealed to men? The classic doctrine of the Bible's inspiration is found in Paul's words to Timothy: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). While Paul wrote this passage in reference to the Old Testament Scriptures, we understand it to apply equally to the New Testament Scriptures.

The Greek words for *God* and *breathe* are combined to form the word translated "inspiration" in this verse. The NIV translators actually choose the phrase "God-breathed" in their version. The emphasis is on the words of Scripture themselves — in contrast to the writers — which are inspired. Three noble truths are revealed in this passage:

- All of Scripture is the object.
- God is the source.
- Humanity is the beneficiary of God's life-changing and life-guiding gift.

God commonly used men to convey His words. Peter describes the method thus: "For prophecy [i.e., Scripture] never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Only in giving the Ten Commandments is God described as the physical/literal writer of Scripture (Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 10:1-5).

Hebrews 1:1 informs us that God spoke at various times and in a variety of ways to get His message to us. Examples of those ways:

- The exact words (Deuteronomy 27:3; Jeremiah 11:1-6; Ezekiel 11:5)
- Words of the writer's choosing (Habakkuk 2:2)
- Dreams (Daniel 7:1; Acts 10:10)
- Through an angel (Revelation 1:1, 2)
- From available sources (Ezra 1:1-4; Luke 1:1-4)
- Through symbolic actions (Isaiah 20:2-6; Jeremiah 13:1-11; Ezekiel 4:1-17)
- By visual aids (Jeremiah 18:1-6)

God inspired His Word with humanity's cultures, places, and languages in mind. He used men and perhaps women (e.g., the books of Ruth and Esther are anonymous and may have been written by the heroines whose exploits they describe) from a variety of social, economic, political, and educational backgrounds, blending their personalities and abilities into His eternal message. Such wisdom produced a message having a unique relevance for people of every nation, kindred, and tongue throughout the ages.

Notes

Many scriptures are preceded with phrases like “Thus saith the Lord” (over 400 times), “the Lord said” (over 1,000 times), and “the word of the Lord” (over 300 times). At least three times readers are enjoined to treat God’s words with utmost care and respect (Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:6; and Revelation 22:18, 19). The purity of His words is proclaimed (Psalm 12:6, 7; 119:130; Proverbs 30:5). Jesus affirmed the preservation of the Scripture, including its smallest parts and particulars (Matthew 5:17, 18).

How we got the Bible

In our day it is easy to take for granted the neat collection of the Bible’s sixty-six books into a single volume in our own language. However, the writing, distribution, recognition, collection, and preservation of Scripture is a process stretching back nearly 3,500 years to the time of Moses and extending to the fourth century AD. This process is referred to as *canonization* — that is, the identification of certain writings as a unique collection of authoritative, God-given Scripture, to the exclusion of other writings. A full discussion of this process would require an entire book. However, we sketch the basic outline here.

The Old Testament was written between 1500 BC and 400 BC by as many as thirty different individuals. While the Old Testament canon was not closed until around AD 250, already in the third century BC there was consensus among the Jews that the writings we call the Old Testament were authoritative and God-given. These Scriptures were divided into three sections: Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy), Prophets, and Writings (e.g., Psalms, Proverbs), a division recognized by Jesus in Luke 24:44.

The New Testament was written between AD 50 and AD 100 by at least seven different individuals. Almost immediately the early church recognized the unique nature of these writings, and by the mid-second century major portions of the New Testament were being circulated and read throughout the Roman Empire. Eventually in response to heretical teachings and the rejection of certain New Testament writings by a number of prominent heretics, the leaders of the church

began to officially identify the canon in accordance with rigorous criteria. A list of writings widely recognized as of God-given origin and authoritative for Christian faith and practice was gradually assembled and agreed upon. By the close of the fourth century AD, church leaders affirmed as canonical the twenty-seven books of the New Testament and thirty-nine books of the Old Testament that we have today. Our church affirms the historic Protestant position in rejecting the Apocryphal writings from the canon.*

Conclusion

When we approach the Bible, it is with the recognition that we are looking into the written Word of God. All Scripture originated with Him as He moved holy men to record, prophesy, remember, and proclaim His inspired Word. While He worked in concert with human authors and the limitations of their times and cultures, it is clear that God’s Word exceeds these limitations and that therefore we can trust that the Scriptures, as originally written, are indeed God’s inspired Word — authoritative and infallible. The Bible is utterly unique in this regard and is therefore our authoritative rule of faith and practice.

Scripture quotations are from the *New King James Version*.

* For more information on the canonization of Scripture, interested readers can obtain the booklet *How We Got the Bible* from Bible Advocate Press, P.O. Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233; bap.orders@cog7.org.

Notes

Statement of Faith 2

The Deity

The sovereign deity of the universe is God Almighty, who is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. He is eternal, infinite, holy, self-existent Spirit who created, sustains, rules, redeems, and judges His creation. He is one in nature, essence and being. God is revealed in Scripture as Father and Son.

God revealed, worshipped

The Bible testifies to God's existence from the first verse onward, declaring, "In the beginning God . . ." (Genesis 1:1). The God of the universe has made Himself known to humanity through creation, through His providential care for all things, through His written Word (the Bible), and through the living Word — His Son, Jesus Christ.

The creative power of God may be seen in the heavens, the earth, and all His wonderful works (Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:19, 20). The sovereign glory of God may be seen by His giving of the law and by the promise of salvation in the prophets. His manifold wisdom is seen in all the written Word, inspired by His Spirit (2 Timothy 3:15, 16). His righteous character, revealed in all the above, is most clearly seen in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son.

Jesus Christ is the Word who was God from the beginning and who became flesh. In Jesus all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily. He is the finest revelation of God by whom we have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life (Matthew 11:27; John 1:1-14; 14:9; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15, 19; 2:9; Hebrews 1:1-3).

The Deity, thus revealed as Father and Son, is the only true God, who alone is worthy to be worshipped. Worship expresses reverence to Him through exaltation, praise, and surrendered lives (Psalm 95:6, 7). Our Master Teacher instructed us in the importance and manner of true worship, saying that we "must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23, 24). Conversely, those who worship God only with their mouths and not their hearts, or according to the doctrines and commandments of men, do so in vain (Matthew 15:6-9).

Attributes of God

God may be known by attributes that are intrinsic to His person. He is:

Almighty, sovereign: The term *almighty*, or *omnipotent*, means having absolute power over all things. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come" (Revelation 4:8; see

also Revelation 16:7 and Genesis 17:1). God's sovereignty means that His authority is above all others; He has neither superior nor equal. The Lord is God; besides Him there is no other. He reigns supreme (Deuteronomy 4:35; 10:17; Psalm 24:1, 10; 1 Timothy 6:15, 16).

Eternal: God is without beginning or end. He is unlimited by time and cannot die. "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever" (1 Timothy 1:17; see also Deuteronomy 33:27; Psalm 41:13; 90:2b).

Omnipresent, invisible spirit: "God is spirit . . ." (John 4:24). In His essential nature, God has none of the limitations of space and matter. His presence may be experienced anywhere and everywhere (Psalm 139:7-10; Jeremiah 23:24). To human eyes, He is invisible. "No one has ever seen God . . ." (John 1:18; 1 Timothy 1:17).

Holy: God's holiness refers to His being separate and different from everything that is not God, from all things common. This is expressed throughout Scripture in many ways, particularly in the repeated refrain "Holy, holy, holy" that is descriptive of God alone (Revelation 4:8; see also Leviticus 19:2; Isaiah 6:3; and Luke 1:49).

Self-existent: In contrast to the dependent state of humans and all created things, God is independent of all others; He needs nothing. He will always remain unaltered, absolute Being. This is implied in the revelation of His name to Moses: "I AM WHO I AM . . . say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14).

All-loving: God is love. His great love for all the world is demonstrated most dramatically in the offering of His only Son as a sacrifice for sin (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 1:4, 7; 1 John 2:1, 2).

Notes

One God, revealed as Father and Son

From start to finish, the Bible knows only one God. The Hebrew *shema* says it best: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4; see also Deuteronomy 4:35; 32:39; 2 Samuel 7:22; 1 Chronicles 17:20; Psalm 86:10; Isaiah 43:10; 44:6; 45:5, 14, 18; Mark 12:29; 1 Corinthians 8:4; Ephesians 4:6; 1 Timothy 2:5).

While Christianity is a monotheistic faith and while our God is numerically one, the best biblical evidence points to the fact that He is uniplural in His divine person. *Uniplural* suggests that God is one in essence but more than one in expression. His uniplurality was fully revealed in the divine-human person of Jesus Christ, but was intimated throughout the Old Testament in various ways. For example:

- God’s occasional use of plural pronouns to refer to Himself (Genesis 1:26; 11:5-9; Isaiah 6:8)
- References to a divine Son (Psalm 2:7-12; Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 3:25)
- Personification of the “Word of God” (Psalm 33:6; 107:20)
- The Hebrew words *elohim* (translated as “God” or “gods”) and *adonai* (translated as “Lord” or “lords”) may be references to the plurality of God’s nature, as well as to the plurality of His power and majesty.
- The Hebrew word *echad* (translated “one” in the *shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4) can refer to a composite, integrated whole, thus allowing for the uniplural nature of God.

God the Father

God the Father of whom are all things, whom no one has seen nor can see, reigns in the heavens and transcends our complete knowing. He is revealed as our loving heavenly Father by His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Ultimately, God the Father will restore perfect harmony to all creation through Christ and reign eternally over the redeemed.

Though God was regarded as Father by Israel (Isaiah 63:16; Jeremiah 3:4; Malachi 1:6) and a divine “Son” is suggested in a few Old Testament texts (e.g., Psalm 2:7), Old Testament references do not explicitly distinguish God as Father and Son. It is mostly in the New Testament that we come to know God as our personal Father.

It is by Jesus the Son that God is primarily revealed to the world as a loving Father in heaven. From the teachings of Christ and His apostles, we learn that God the Father is the source of all things. “For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live . . .” (1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 4:4, 6).

This God who is an eternal, invisible, yet omnipresent Spirit-being, reigns in the heavens and far exceeds our ability to fully know and comprehend Him (Matthew 6:6; 11:25-27; Mark 11:25; Luke 10:21, 22; 11:2; Romans 11:33, 34; 1 Corinthians 2:16).

Jesus revealed the loving heavenly Father in many ways. He taught His disciples to pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name . . .” (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2).

Notes

Following Jesus' example, we may approach the almighty Father in familiar terms without showing disrespect: "Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed . . . 'Abba, Father . . .'" (Mark 14:35, 36a). *Abba* is an Aramaic term of endearment, equivalent to our English word *daddy*. We are free to call upon our heavenly Father by this familiar term. "You received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father'" (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6).

Further, Jesus revealed the intent of God the Father to restore harmony throughout His creation through the Son. God was pleased to provide for reconciliation of the fallen world to Himself, through Christ (Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19; Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:19, 20).

Finally, the Father has committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22, 27; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Revelation 20:11-15). When Jesus has judged the world and deposed everything that now opposes God, He will have completely restored righteousness and peace. Then the Father will reign supreme with the righteous throughout eternity (1 Corinthians 15:28; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1-4).

Jesus the Son

Jesus Christ is God's one and only begotten Son. As begotten, not created, He shares the nature, names, and attributes of God with the Father. As Son, not Father, Jesus is subordinate to His Father in rank. From eternity, the Son was with the Father, shared the Father's glory as the pre-incarnate Word, and with Him created and sustains all things. Jesus the Christ (Messiah) was born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, thus uniting two natures — human and divine. Jesus lived without sin, died as an atoning sacrifice for sin, was entombed for three days and three nights, was resurrected bodily, and ascended to His Father to serve as mediator and high priest. He reigns as Lord in heaven and will return to earth as judge and king. Now it pleases the Father that the Son be preeminent in all things and receives our worship.

Jesus Christ is the foundation and head of the true Christian church and of all Christians individually. Old Testament prophecies spoke of His coming as Messiah, Savior, and King. These were fulfilled in His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension; they will be consummated at His return.

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God's one and only begotten

The introduction of Jesus as the divine Son of God occurred before He was born, when the angel Gabriel told His mother, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:30-32).

John's Gospel uses the Greek term *monogenes*, translated “only begotten” (KJV, NASB), exclusively to describe Jesus as God's Son — five times (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; cf. 1 John 4:9). This “only begotten” phrase refers to the Son's relation to His Father, and is significant in two ways:

1. It refers to the exclusive, intimate relationship shared by the divine Son and His Father: “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known” (John 1:18).
2. As the “only begotten” Son, Jesus is contrasted with others who became the “sons” of God by faith in His name, thereby becoming God's adopted children (John 1:12, 13; Galatians 3:26; Romans 8:15).

God's divine Son is begotten of Him, not created. All created things came into being by God through Jesus Christ (John 1:3, Colossians 1:16).

Sharing God's names and nature

The unique nature and identity of Jesus Christ is further seen in Scripture by the fact that several divine names are used in reference both to the Father and the Son. For example, the ancient Old Testament (Hebrew) name for God, Yahweh (or LORD), is later employed in the New Testament for the person of God's Son.

In Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:2, 3; and Luke 3:4-6 a prophecy is quoted from Isaiah 40:3: “In the desert prepare the way for the LORD [Yahweh]; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.” In Isaiah, the LORD is God. In the Gospels, it is Jesus!

In Genesis 1:1 and 2:4, God the LORD (Yahweh) is the Creator. But in John 1:1; Colossians 1:16; and Hebrews 1:2 Jesus is Creator of all things. In Hebrews 1:10 the Father praises the Son for creating the heavens and the earth, referring to the Son as LORD (Yahweh). In the matter of Creation, Christ is associated with the name LORD (Yahweh) in the closest possible way.

Joel 2:32 says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD [Yahweh] will be saved.” Paul quoted this in Romans 10:13: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” In Joel, Yahweh saves; but in Romans, Jesus saves. Thus Jesus shares the name *Yahweh* with the Father.

Also compare Isaiah 45:22, 23 with Philippians 2:11, where the sole allegiance of all things to the LORD (Yahweh), according to Isaiah, is now delivered up to the Lord Jesus Christ, according to Paul — all to the glory of God!

Thus we see that New Testament writers and believers refer to Jesus as Lord with the same reverence and preeminence that they gave to the LORD (Yahweh) of the Old Testament.

Among other examples of addressing Christ and His Father by the same names or titles are these:

- First Timothy 6:14-16 uses the phrase “King of kings and Lord of Lords” in a context that describes God the Father. The same phrase is used as a label for the returning Christ in Revelation 19:16.
- Hebrews 1:8, quoting from Psalm 45:6, 7, reports that the Father God can address His Son directly as God: “About the Son he [God] says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever. . . .’”
- In Revelation 1:8 (NKJV), 11, 17 the glorified Christ takes names for Himself (Alpha and Omega, Beginning and End, First and Last) that have been reserved for Yahweh (see Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12).
- Thomas addressed Jesus as “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

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The preceding text introduces a most striking illustration of the fact that the Bible's inspired authors and Jesus' disciples could easily speak of Him in highest terms, even calling Him God. Ten additional examples of this are found in: Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 1:23; John 1:1; 5:18; 20:28; Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:2, 9; 1 Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; and 1 John 5:20.

Jesus shares not only the names of God but also His nature:

"Who [Jesus], being in very nature God . . ." (Philippians 2:6).

"He is the image of the invisible God . . . For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. . . . For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Colossians 1:15-19; 2:9).

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being . . ." (Hebrews 1:3).

Jesus shares the prerogatives of God

Among the most compelling evidences Scripture offers for Christ's divinity and equality of essence with His Father is this: What only God can do, Jesus did! Note these examples:

- Only God is the Creator; Jesus Christ created: "Through him [the divine Word] all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3; see also 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2).
- Only God saves and forgives sins; Jesus does the same: "He said . . . 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' Now some teachers of the law were . . . thinking to themselves . . . 'Who can forgive sins but God alone?' . . . 'But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . .'" (Mark 2:5-7, 10; see also Luke 2:10, 11; Acts 4:12).
- Only God is sinless; Jesus Christ never sinned: "We have one [high priest] who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin" (Hebrews 4:15; see also 7:26, 27; 2 Corinthians 5:21).
- Only God rightly receives worship (Matthew 4:10) and prayers; Jesus received both: "They saw the child [Jesus] with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him" (Matthew 2:11; 8:2; 14:33; 28:9, 16, 17; John 9:38; Revelation 5:13). While they

were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59; cf. Matthew 9:18; 15:25; Luke 24:52).

- Only God sees the secrets of men; Jesus did as well: “[He] had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man” (John 2:25, NKJV; see also Matthew 9:4; Mark 12:15; John 6:15, 64).
- God controls the elements; so did Jesus: “And in him [Christ] all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16, 17; see also Hebrews 1:3; Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:27; 4:39, 41).
- God has life in Himself; so does Christ: “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life’” (John 11:25). “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it” (5:21, 28, 29).
- God sends the Spirit, and so does Christ: “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father . . .” (John 15:26; 16:7b, NKJV).
- God is king and judge, and so is Christ (John 5:22, 27).

The foregoing points lead us to the firm conclusion that Jesus Christ the Son was, in His preexistence and in His eternal essence, God. Not a second God, He shared the singular deity of the Father. Jesus was introduced as such in the announcement of His impending birth: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel — which means, ‘God with us’” (Matthew 1:23). The full import of the Immanuel passage is seen when we read it against the backdrop of the prophecy from Isaiah that it fulfills. Isaiah 9:6, 7 refers to a promised Child, the Son who will rule and be called “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end . . .” (NKJV).

And what would Christ himself say about His relation to God, His Father? Jesus made at least three statements that were understood by His Jewish audiences as claims to deity:

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- “‘My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.’ For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him . . . he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:17, 18). Jesus did not deny their understanding of His statement, though they threatened Him harm because of it.
- “‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘Before Abraham was born, I am!’” (John 8:58). Because of this, the indignant Jews attempted to stone Him for blasphemy (v. 59), associating His “I am” with God’s self-revelation to Moses: “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). This violent reaction to the use of “I am” by Jesus is seen in Mark 14:61-63, thus confirming that those two words were a claim to self-existent Deity.
- “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30, NKJV). Again note the Jews’ reaction to this claim: They picked up stones to stone Jesus for blasphemy, interpreting His statement as a claim to be God (vv. 31-33). The Greek neuter pronoun *hen*, translated “one,” goes beyond the meaning of merely being “one in purpose” with God. In using this word, Jesus asserted His equality with God in character and nature, while preserving His personal individuality.

Subordinate to the Father in rank

The phrase “only begotten Son of the Father” reveals two complimentary truths about Jesus Christ: 1) His inherent, essential nature and 2) His position within the Godhead.

In regard to nature, the phrase indicates the full deity of Christ. Through begetting, the Son consists of the same nature, substance, or “stuff” as the Father. The term *begotten* reveals the Son’s divinity because the One from whom He was begotten is divine. Since the Son is of the same divine substance as the Father, He is an equal member of the Godhead and shares with the Father the nature, attributes, and title of God.

In regard to position, the phrase “only begotten Son of the Father” also indicates their relationship as Father and Son. The term *begotten* indicates that the Son is under the Father’s authority. The Son is begotten, while the Father alone is unbegotten. Because the Son acts

only in accord with the Father, and not of Himself, He is subordinate to the Father in divine rank (John 5:19, 20).

However, the subordination of the Son to His Father does not make Him a separate or second God. By nature, the Son remains equal to the Father, sharing with Him the one divine substance of the Godhead. Although the Father and Son differ in role and position, the equality in nature of Father and Son preserves the oneness of the Godhead.

For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:25-28).

The recorded experiences of Jesus Christ here on earth show that He was not only divine but also truly human. The fact of His full humanity explains much of the subordination and limitation that are described of Him who was also fully divine.

As a man:

- He was born of a woman and experienced the developmental stages of childhood.
- He worked as a carpenter, became weary in body as well as hungry and thirsty.
- He had limited knowledge on the future (Mark 13:32).
- He experienced all temptations common to man and the emotions of anger, fear, etc.
- He suffered, bled, and died as a man.

Readers are encouraged to invest additional study in these classic texts on the deity and humanity of the Son:

- John 1:1-14 - He was the Word — God — and with God in heav-

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en. He took on flesh and tabernacled among us on earth. This is the most profound statement of deity and incarnation in the Bible.

- Philippians 2:5-11 - He did not cling to equality with God. Prior to His incarnation, Jesus existed “in very nature God” (v. 6), a condition that did not change with His incarnation. So while “in very nature God,” He took upon Himself “the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (v. 7), as a temporary condition. Thus, in His incarnation, Jesus, the Messiah, united the nature of God with the nature of man.
- Colossians 1:15, 19; 2:9 - “He is the image of the invisible God . . . For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him . . . For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.”
- Hebrews 1:1-14 - He is the radiance of God’s glory and exact representation of His being (v. 3) — so much better than the angels (v. 4):
 - Angels are created; the Son is begotten (v. 5).
 - Angels are worshippers; the Son is worshipped (v. 6).
 - Angels are created and made; the Son is Creator (vv. 7, 10-12).
 - Angels are sent from God; the Son is God, with God (vv. 8, 9, 14).
 - Angels worship around the throne; the Son is on the throne (vv. 6-8, 13).

As Hebrews 1 stresses the deity of the Son, so Hebrews 2 emphasizes His humanity (see especially vv. 9-18).

Preexistence and incarnation

The Son was with the Father from eternity and shared the Father’s glory as the pre-incarnate Word. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God . . . He was in the beginning with God . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father . . .” (John 1:1-3, 14; see also 17:5, NASB). Thus the pre-incarnate Son in heaven came to be the Lord Jesus Christ here on earth (Matthew 1:18, 20-22 and Luke 1:26; 31-34; 2:4-7).

In 2 Corinthians 8:9 Paul described Jesus’ incomprehensible sacri-

fice in becoming human: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

Life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension

Jesus lived without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5). The earthly life of Christ represents full submission and obedience to the Father’s will (Hebrews 10:7). His obedience was seen in carrying out His mission to bring salvation, healing, deliverance, and hope. Jesus accomplished this through preaching, teaching, healing, overcoming the enemy, and demonstrating God’s lovingkindness to sinners. This perfect obedience completely satisfied the righteous demands of God’s law and qualified Jesus to lay down His life as an efficacious sacrifice, not for His own sins but for the sins of the world.

Jesus died as an atoning sacrifice for sins and was buried. The cross of Jesus Christ is central to the account of all four New Testament Gospels and to the writings of the apostles that follow. The Gospels focus on the historical facts of His death and burial, while the Epistles emphasize the spiritual application: “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried . . .” (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4a; Philippians 2:8; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18, 19; 1 John 2:2).

Jesus was raised bodily from the dead. The resurrection and ascension of Christ bring the accounts of His death and burial to their appointed, triumphant culmination. “In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. . . .” (KJV). The angel(s) said to the anxious women, who made multiple visits to the tomb, “Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not

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here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay” (Matthew 28:1, 5, 6; Mark 16:1-6; Luke 24:1-9; John 20:1-8, KJV).

Christ’s victory over death and the grave was central to the message of the early church (Acts 1:3, 4; 2:32; 3:15; 4:10; 10:40; 13:30; 17:31). One of Apostle Paul’s greatest chapters, 1 Corinthians 15, insists on the essential truth of Jesus’ bodily resurrection, and unpacks its precious hope and promise.

After rising from death, Jesus ascended into heaven where He intercedes as our high priest and reigns as Lord (Acts 1:9-11; 7:55; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:25; 1 Peter 3:22).

Jesus will return to sit as judge and reign as king. “When the Son of Man [Jesus] comes in his glory and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25:31, 32; John 5:22; Acts 10:42; Revelation 1:5; 17:14; 19:16).

It pleased the Father that the Son be preeminent in all things. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. . . . he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy” (Colossians 1:15, 18; Philippians 2:8-11).

Jesus Christ the Son of God is Lord of all and worthy of our worship! “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever! The four living creatures said, ‘Amen,’ and the elders fell down and worshipped” (Revelation 5:13, 14; see also Matthew 28:9-17; Luke 24:52; Hebrews 1:6).

How Long in the Grave?

The Church teaches that the duration of Jesus' entombment was for a full three days and three nights. The common teaching that Christ was crucified on Friday and raised early on Sunday morning does not fulfill the sign Jesus gave the unbelieving Jews:

"A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:38-40).

The sequence of events in the week of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, we believe, was as follows:

- Tuesday: Jesus gathered with His disciples in the upper room and instituted the Lord's Supper in the evening before He was betrayed and arrested (1 Corinthians 11:23). Later that night he prayed in the garden, was arrested, and tried before the high priest.
- Wednesday: After appearing before Herod and Pilate (Luke 22:66-71; 23:1-24), Jesus was crucified about 9:00 a.m. on the day of preparation for an annual Sabbath (Luke 22:14-71; 23:1-33; Matthew 27:33-35; John 19:31-34). He died about 3:00 p.m. Wednesday and was buried just before sunset that evening (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:41, 42).
- Thursday: This was Jesus' first full day in the tomb. It was also the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and an annual high-day Sabbath (Leviticus 23:4-8; John 19:31-42). On this day the Jewish leaders went to Pilate and requested him to secure the tomb (Matthew 27:62-66).
- Friday: Jesus' second full day in the tomb was also the preparation

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of the weekly Sabbath, giving opportunity for the women to buy and prepare spices with which to embalm Jesus' body.

- Sabbath: On Jesus' third full day in the tomb: "They rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment" (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:55, 56). Late that afternoon, the two Marys went to see where Jesus was laid (Matthew 28:1, KJV). As they neared the tomb, a great earthquake occurred. Upon arrival, they saw that the stone had been rolled back and learned from an angel that Jesus was not there but had risen from the dead (Matthew 28:2-6).
- Sunday: Very early on this first day of the week, further visits to the tomb confirmed that the tomb was empty indeed (Mark 16:1ff; Luke 24:1ff; John 20:1ff).

Thus the duration of Jesus' entombment was from just before sunset on Wednesday evening until just before sunset on Sabbath evening. This chronology provides the full count of three days and three nights in accordance with Jesus' only sign to the Jews (Matthew 12:39, 40).

Those who had heard this sign took precautions to keep His body from disappearing until after three days. On the day following Jesus' crucifixion, therefore, chief priests and Pharisees requested Pilate to secure the tomb because they remembered that Jesus had said, "After three days I will rise again" (27:62-64).

Consider this further evidence.

First, Mark records Jesus' predictions of His entombment in two variant forms. He says the Son of Man must suffer, be killed, and rise again "after three days" (8:31) and one chapter later says He will be killed and rise "the third day" (9:31, NKJV). These phrases each equate to a condensed form of "three days and three nights." Taken together, they require the latter phrase's full complement of time.

A term that appears more often for the duration of Christ's entombment is "on the third day" (Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Mark 10:34 (NKJV); Luke 9:22; 18:33; 1 Corinthians 15:4). It is less specific than "three days and three nights" and "after three days." Logically, it cannot refer to a shorter period than the previous two expressions.

The burial of Jesus on Wednesday evening and His resurrection late

on Sabbath best account for the variety involved in these three expressions.

Second, the expression “three days and three nights” and “after three days” are not idioms by which any portion of a day or night counts as the whole of that day or night. The argument that all references to the duration of Jesus’ entombment are idioms is widely taught to support the theory of a Friday crucifixion and a Sunday resurrection.

However, the full expression “three days and three nights” requires a full count of days and nights, casting great doubt on the possibility that references to the duration of Jesus’ entombment are idioms.

Third, a key to appreciating the duration of Jesus’ entombment is Jesus’ Sabbath afternoon resurrection. While we may not know the exact moment of His resurrection, Matthew’s chronicle of events in chapter 28:1 provides evidence of its approximate time.

Several versions of the Bible — KJV, NAS (early translations), ASV (1901 edition), Douay, and James Moffatt — report that the tomb was empty when the two Marys arrived there late on Sabbath afternoon, just before the day ended at sunset.

Matthew (28:1) used two “time” references to describe the arrival of the women at the tomb, after Jesus had risen from the dead:

a. He used the Greek term *opse* in the phrase “In the end [*opse*] of the sabbath” (KJV). This first reference to the women’s arrival at the tomb places it on the Sabbath, just before the day ended. The Jewish day ended at sunset, not sunrise! *Opse* is used three times in the Greek Scriptures and always describes an evening scene. In Matthew 28:1, “in the end” of the Sabbath; in Mark 11:19, “even was come”; and in Mark 13:35, “at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning,” describing the first of the four watches of the night that usually began at sunset. These references demonstrate that *opse* is used to describe the evening end of a twenty-four-hour day, and not

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the morning beginning of a twelve-hour day as described in Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; and John 20:1 to report the subsequent visits of the women to the tomb early on Sunday morning. The translation of *opse* as “after” is deceptive!

b. Matthew’s second “time” reference is *epiphosko*, translated “dawn.” *Epiphosko* is used twice in the New Testament. In both Matthew 28:1 and Luke 23:54, the word is rightly used for the “approach” of a new twenty-four hour day, which began at sunset, according to Jewish custom. It does not refer to sunrise of the twelve-hour day, as described in Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1.

Fourth, some versions of the Bible translate Matthew 28:1 as “after the Sabbath,” rather than “in the end of the Sabbath.” There is no justification for the translation “after” in this text. *Opse* is an adverb of time used with *sabbaton*, a noun in the genitive case, in Matthew 28:1. It is correctly translated “late on the Sabbath.” Joseph Henry Thayer wrote that *opse*, followed by a genitive (noun), “seems always to be partitive, denoting *late in* the period specified by the gen. (and consequently, still belonging to it) . . .” (*The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, *opse*, p. 471).

Greek writers of a later period used *opse* as a preposition followed by a genitive noun, and it was translated “after.” That rule does not apply to Matthew 28:1 because in that verse, it is an adverb followed by a genitive noun. Therefore its translation as “late” is the only appropriate rendering.

There is no need to try to make Matthew 28:1, “In the end of the sabbath” (KJV), agree with Mark 16:1: “When the Sabbath was over.” We must observe that the anxious women made multiple visits to the tomb!

The grammatical evidence from Matthew 28:1 given here rules out the possibility of a Sunday morning resurrection, and therefore of a Friday evening burial for our Lord.

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the promised divine helper who proceeds from the Father and Son. The Spirit is God's presence and power in the world and indwells believers. By the Holy Spirit, God inspired and illuminates the Scriptures; convicts and regenerates sinners; sanctifies, teaches, comforts, guides, and preserves believers and empowers them for service. Evidence of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life is faith in Christ, obedience to God, and the spiritual fruit of love.

Throughout the Bible

The one true God who has revealed Himself as a personal Father and Son now comes to the world and dwells within His people through the Spirit. The Bible texts speak of this divine agency in various terms: e.g., Holy Spirit, the Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Truth, and the Spirit of Christ. All of these refer to the same entity.

The Holy Spirit's work as God's divine representative and personal presence in the world is well established in Scripture. Consider: God's creation was facilitated by His Spirit (Genesis 1:2). God told Moses that He had filled Bezalel with His Spirit to enable him in all kinds of craftsmanship for the work of building the tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-5). Samson obtained his great strength by the Spirit of the Lord (Judg-

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es 14:6; 15:14). Saul was filled with the Spirit of God and prophesied (1 Samuel 10:10). The Spirit of the Lord came upon David as Samuel anointed him King of Israel (1 Samuel 16:13).

The Holy Spirit confirmed Jesus' identity to John the Baptist following His baptism (Matthew 3:16, 17; Mark 1:10, 11; Luke 3:22; John 1:32-34). The same Spirit that dwelt in Christ without measure has now been given to dwell in the hearts of God's saints until the Lord returns to establish His kingdom (John 7:37-39; Acts 2:38, 39). The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus as the Christ (1 Corinthians 12:3). Peter and Paul described the role of the Holy Spirit in the origin of God's written Word (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16).

The promise, the coming

The most detailed promise of the coming of the Spirit is found in the prophet Joel (2:28, 29): "I will pour out my Spirit on all people Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days." Other Hebrew prophets also spoke of the Spirit's coming (Isaiah 44:3; Ezekiel 36:27; 39:29).

John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Messiah (Mark 1:1-4), spoke of baptism in the Spirit: "After me will come one more powerful than I . . . I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:7, 8; Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16). Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would be given to all who believed in Him (John 7:37, 39).

After Jesus' resurrection, He instructed the disciples not to leave Jerusalem but to "Wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4, 5; Luke 24:49).

These promises were fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2, when the Spirit came to dwell with Jesus' disciples in a personal and permanent way. While the Spirit had filled or anointed individuals in Old Testament times, He was given uniquely by Jesus Christ and remains upon and within Jesus' followers (John 14:17; Romans 8:9; 1 John 2:27). Rather than taking the place of the ascended Christ, the Holy Spirit actually provides Jesus' presence in the church

until He returns. This He does by indwelling and transforming each believer, as summarized in John 14:17, 18; Romans 8:11; 1 Corinthians 3:16; and 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18.

Divine Helper

Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the Helper, Advocate, Comforter, and Counselor. These terms are translated from the Greek word *paraklete*, which literally means “to be called alongside to provide needed aid or assistance.”

In his last recorded teaching before His death on the cross, Jesus told the disciples just what kind of assistance the Holy Spirit would provide, and how:

- He would come to live with us and remain here (John 14:16-18; Matthew 28:20).
- He would teach and remind us of all things Jesus said (John 14:26; 1 John 2:27).
- He would guide Jesus’ followers into all truth (John 16:13; 1 John 2:27).
- He would speak what the Father and Son tell Him, about things future (John 16:13).
- He would convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11).

Later, the apostle Paul further described the helping ministry of the Spirit. The Spirit . . .

- enables believers to obey God (Romans 8:5-9, 13);
- intercedes to help believers overcome weaknesses (v. 26);
- testifies of Jesus (1 Corinthians 12:3; see Matthew 16:16, 17);
- distributes spiritual gifts for the church’s edification (1 Corinthians 12:7-11);

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- produces spiritual fruit in the lives of believers (Galatians 5:22-25);
- guarantees God's intention to redeem the saints and bestow eternal life upon them (2 Corinthians 1:21, 22; Ephesians 1:13, 14);
- preserves believers until Jesus returns (2 Corinthians 1:21, 22);
- sanctifies believers (Romans 15:15, 16; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2).

Gospel works, fruits, gifts

Just before His departure, Jesus assured His disciples that, when the Spirit came upon them, they would be empowered to do God's work in the world: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses . . ." (Acts 1:8). We see the fulfillment of this promise in the book of Acts as God bestowed gifts upon, and worked miracles through, the believers. The Epistles testify to God's enduring design that the church be a miraculously gifted body that edifies itself, as well as ministers to the outside world.

Through the Holy Spirit, God also works in believers' lives to perfect godly character that reflects the divine nature of Christ. "His divine power [Spirit] has given us everything we need for life and godliness . . ." (2 Peter 1:3; also 4-8). Paul describes the qualities we need as the "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22, 23).

God works for the salvation of humanity through His church, empowered by the Spirit. The Spirit distributes spiritual gifts to equip and enable the church to carry out its many ministries (1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-31).

The Holy Spirit both inspired the writing of God's Word (2 Peter 1:20, 21; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17) and illuminates the Scriptures (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 1 John 2:27).

The Spirit convicts sinners. Jesus described the work of the Counselor that was to come: "He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness . . ." (John 16:8). An example of this conviction by the Spirit occurred during Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost: "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart [convicted] and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" And "Those who accepted his message were baptized . . ." (Acts 2:37, 41).

Regeneration (new birth) of sinners in the Scripture is a work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus advised Nicodemus that he must undergo a spiritual rebirth to see the kingdom of God: “No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:3, 5; see also Romans 8:13, 14; Titus 3:5).

The Spirit not only teaches God’s Word (John 14:26; 16:13) but also guides and directs believers. The Spirit directed the apostle Paul to go to Macedonia instead of Bithynia (Acts 16:6-10; see also Matthew 4:1; Luke 4:1).

Paul recognized that God empowered believers to preach the gospel of Christ through spiritual gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:11-13; see also Acts 10:37, 38).

The evidence: faith, obedience, love

A key question we must consider here is how does one know that he/she has received the Holy Spirit?

The first answer that can be given with confidence is this: We know that we have received of God’s Spirit when we truly trust in Christ and confess Him as the Lord and Savior of our lives. This is supported by Paul’s words: “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3b; see also John 14:17; Galatians 3:5, 14; 1 John 4:2).

The converse of this link between faith and the Spirit is seen in Romans 8:9b: “Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His” (NKJV).

A second biblical evidence of the indwelling Spirit is walking in the way of spiritual obedience to God and His Word. The Scriptures equate persistent disobedience with resisting the Spirit (Acts 7:51),

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grieving the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), and quenching the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19, NKJV).

The apostle John drew a strong link between receiving the Spirit and keeping God's commands: "Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us" (1 John 3:24, NKJV; see also Acts 5:32).

The clearest indicator that one has received of God's Spirit and is walking therein is the spiritual fruit of love. Paul gives preeminence to love in his list of Spirit's fruit, in Galatians 5:22-23. These spiritual virtues comprise the very character of God (1 John 4:8, 16).

For Paul love is the "more excellent" way (1 Corinthians 12:31). Above all other spiritual gifts, he devoted chapter 13 to the excellence of love: "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love" (v. 13).

Jesus affirmed that love is the supreme test. In the same context that He introduced the Holy Spirit as the divine Helper from heaven (John 14, 15, 16), He instructed His disciples, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (13:35).

Holy Spirit: nature and person?

Is the Holy Spirit, then, a third person of the Godhead, as the Father and Son are persons? There is no simple answer to this question, nor a complex formula by which the Christian Deity may be fully analyzed and finally summarized.

Since God is holy and God is Spirit, we should think of the Holy Spirit as identified with God in the closest possible way. When the Holy Spirit moves, we rightly say, "God is moving among His people." The Holy Spirit is divine —not human and not "another God." Rather than an impersonal "force" or "extension" of God, the Holy Spirit should be regarded as God's personal presence with and within His people on earth.

When we speak of God in heaven — transcendent and wholly other — we think of the Father. When we speak of God on earth — immanent and known in human terms — we think of the Son. When we

speak of God omnipresent — at work in the world and in our hearts —we think of the Holy Spirit. Still, we confess only one true and living God who has become all things to His people.

Consider this evidence. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned in most New Testament salutations, benedictions, or doxologies (as are the Father and Son). The Holy Spirit is not pictured as enthroned or reigning in heaven (as are Father and Son). The Holy Spirit is not recorded as being worshipped or addressed in prayers (as are Father and Son). The Holy Spirit has no recorded “I-Thou” communications with Father or Son (as they do with each other). Thus, it is better to think of the Spirit as the personal presence of the Father and Son on earth and within believers, rather than as a third person of the Godhead in the same sense as Father and Son.

Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, except where noted.

Notes

Statement of Faith 3

*Man, Satan,
Sin, and Death*

Humanity was created in the image of God as sinless, but not naturally immortal. Sin entered the world when Adam and Eve yielded to the temptation of God's adversary, Satan. The Devil, capable of transforming himself into an angel of light to deceive and destroy humanity, will finally be destroyed in the lake of fire. As a result of Adam's fall, all humanity became sinners by nature and by choice. The result is spiritual separation from God, physical death in an unconscious state, and eternal death for those who do not receive salvation in Christ.

When God created Adam and Eve, He made them in His image and likeness (Genesis 1:26, 27). They were the showpieces of His creation, the culmination of all created beings. No other creatures were given such similarity to deity — only mankind. Just flesh and bones, but made in the image and likeness of God. And when God surveyed all that He had created on the sixth day, including humans, “indeed it was very good” (v. 31).

In every way, Adam and Eve were exactly as God wanted them. One could say they were perfect. He fashioned them with His own hands, forming Adam first from the “dust of the ground” and breathing life into his nostrils (2:7). Then, using a rib from Adam’s side, He formed Eve, “a helper comparable to him” (vv. 20-22). Life was vibrant and exciting. They basked in innocence, for nothing defiling was part of their surroundings. The couple breathed the fresh, pure air as though they would live forever. And, indeed, they could have, had they not disobeyed the one restriction God gave them: “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat . . .” (v. 17).

Being made in the image and likeness of God opens unlimited potential regarding human capabilities and characteristics. Though humans were invested with spirit, we are not spiritual beings as God is. Humans are finite, not infinite as He is. But most importantly, humans were made with the capacity to communicate with God. They enjoyed open fellowship with God originally, walking with Him in the cool of the evening (3:8).

Human responsibilities were minimal: “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it” (1:28) and “tend and keep” the garden (2:15). What a blissful setting with all that was good surrounding them! All was wholesome and good. Not even weeds were present to call for extra effort to “tend and keep” the garden.

This paradise was sure to be interrupted, however. The Devil would not let it continue. He was intent on defiling God’s beautiful creation, especially humans. His basic goal is to destroy the work of God. There is no good in him; he opposes and seeks to destroy all that is good. We are warned, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). So it would be expected that the Devil would make an attack on God’s beautiful creation.

Employing his number one tactic, deception, Satan in the form of a serpent achieved his desired end. The serpent, being “more cunning than any beast of the field” (Genesis 3:1), deceived Eve into eating from the forbidden tree. When she saw “that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate” (v. 6a). She was so impressed that “She also gave to her husband with her,

and he ate” (v. 6b). “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked” (v. 7).

Immediately the aura of innocence was gone. The scene was corrupted! “Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). One act of disobedience threw the entire creation into a downward spiral, known as the Fall — a fall that still holds all humanity captive until God’s provided deliverance is received through acceptance of Jesus as Savior. Galatians 3:22 says, “But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”

For Adam and Eve, being the first generation of Satan-duped humans, the results were immediate. They became carnal; that is, they became governed by mere human nature, given to passions and appetites. They attempted to hide their nakedness because they were ashamed — perhaps ashamed of their nakedness, perhaps of their disobedience. This effectively terminated the intimate relationship that had existed between them and their Creator. Thereafter they were afraid to be open with God. Just as God later told His people, Israel, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you . . .” (Isaiah 59:2). For Adam and Eve, as well as for all humanity, there arose a barrier between God and man that could only be overcome through Jesus Christ.

Only because of God’s limitless mercy is there any hope of a restoration of this intimacy. And, of course, there is no limit to His supply of mercy, as John 3:16 indicates: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Paul further testified to this: “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

God being just, He proceeded to administer punishment for the offense. He pronounced curses upon Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:16-19), which have been handed down to succeeding generations so that every living human has come under the terms of the curses. Death, hardship in survival, pain

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in childbirth, sorrow, even thorns and thistles were among them. And then to cap it off, God drove Adam and Eve out of the garden, making sure they could never reenter it. “Therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life” (Genesis 3:23, 24).

The curse of death that God pronounced upon Adam came to be reality for mankind (Romans 5:12). All are destined to die. Hebrews 9:27 says, “It is appointed for men to die once. . . .” Even the Son of God died: “For to this end *Christ died* and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living” (Romans 14:9). Death is as certain as the sunrise. In the garden, Satan told Eve, “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4), but God had said, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it *you shall surely die*” (2:17). And as part of the curse pronounced on Adam, God said, “dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (3:19). That settles it: Death is sure!

First, physical death is inherited because of Adam’s sin, but then it is also the result of each one’s personal sin. Romans 5:12 says, “Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.” Romans 3:23 adds, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Adam’s sin, your sin, and mine are reckoned with by death.

But there is coming a time when death will be no more, a time when sin will be gone forever. “So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Corinthians 15:54). This will occur for the redeemed when Jesus returns and the righteous are called from their graves. Mortality will be replaced by immortality!

To die is to cease to live, cease to be conscious, cease to think and speak and move. To be dead is to be without consciousness: “The dead know nothing . . .” (Ecclesiastes 9:5). When any mortal dies, “His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans [thoughts] perish,” according to Psalm 146:4. Death is commonly referred to in the Scripture as a sleep (Daniel 12:2; Mark 5:39; John 11:11; 1 Corinthians 15:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:13). One day death itself will be destroyed, according to Revelation 20:14, which says, “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.”

There is also spiritual death, which is the absence of spiritual life. Paul

wrote of this in his letter to the Ephesians: “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (2:1). He also wrote of it in his first epistle to Timothy: “But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives” (5:6). These verses tell us that physical life and spiritual death can be experienced simultaneously. How much better it is to know the impact of spiritual life while enjoying physical life! This is what Romans 6 speaks of in connection with dying out to sin and rising to “walk in newness of life” (vv. 4-7). Ephesians 2:1 adds, “You He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins.”

Everybody experiences physical death, and because of the carnal nature, everybody is spiritually dead until the change is brought about by the wonder of salvation. To be carnally minded is death — that is, to attend to the passions and appetites of the flesh. But to be spiritually minded — to set one’s focus on things of the Spirit — is life and peace (see Romans 8:5, 6). The difference is that Jesus gives life, and sin brings death. It’s as simple as that.

Satan began his dastardly efforts against the work of God in the Garden of Eden and has continued it to this day. In Revelation 12:9 he is identified as “that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan.” And that verse further says he “deceives the whole world.” In every nook of creation where there is a human, Satan’s deceptive antics continue. As “the accuser of our brethren” (v. 10), he is waging war against the people of God. Verse 17 in that chapter says, “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” The phrase “the rest of her offspring” is all-inclusive; it leaves out no child of God, right down to the end. Satan’s destructive attacks on God’s people will continue until the Lord says, “Enough!” Thankfully, God has provided deliverance through the sacrifice of Jesus and the working of the Holy Spirit. Satan *can* be overcome; Jesus provided the way. Revelation 12:11 says, “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. . . .”

Satan’s evil schemes and fiery darts mentioned in Ephesians 6:11 and 16 continue to hurt, hinder, and destroy people of God. Multitudes choose not

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to receive God's provided deliverance. They will go to the grave, captives of Satan. Of course, that means they will rise to a judgment of condemnation. In 2 Thessalonians 1:9 their fate is described this way: "These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

Revelation 20:11-15 gives details of the great white throne judgment. John was shown that "the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books" (v. 12). Verse 15 adds, "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." Thus, the end for them comes in their annihilation. Malachi 4:1 says:

"For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch."

That is complete, total annihilation — eternally separated from God in death.

As for the Devil's end, Scripture is clear. The very first prophecy about his doom is in the account of the Fall. Genesis 3:15 says:

"And I will put enmity between you [that's the serpent, Satan's vessel] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He [that's the woman's Seed, Jesus] shall bruise your head [Satan's head, implying a fatal blow], and you shall bruise His heel [suggesting a superficial injury to Jesus; He resurrected from the tomb]."

Revelation 20 gives further specifics about Satan's end:

1. For 1,000 years, he will be bound and confined to "the bottomless pit" (vv. 1-3).

2. After the 1,000 years, he will be released and will rally the nations to attack "the camp of the saints" (vv. 7-9).

3. Before any conflict starts, he will be "cast into the lake of fire" (v. 10).

With the destruction of Satan, death itself will be destroyed (vv. 13, 14.)

The fellowship with God that was lost when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit will be restored (21:3). All who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus will forever be with the Lord. Though the penalty of death is upon every one — all will die — deliverance from the grave is available to everyone through Jesus. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Jesus came into the world that we might live both

now and forever: abundant life in Him *now* (10:10) and everlasting life in the world to come. Jesus still says, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). He still offers salvation to all who will come.

Come to Jesus!

Scripture quotations are from the *New King James Version*.

Notes

Statement of Faith 4

Man, Salvation, and Life

Sinful humanity may be saved from the penalty of eternal death and receive eternal life instead, solely by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from human merit, works, or ceremonies.

Atonement for sins, with its attendant promise of eternal life, comes through Christ's death and resurrection on our behalf and is received in human experience by faith and repentance.

Part I: Need for Salvation

People need salvation. The gospel message of Scripture is so designed that it appeals best to those who are most aware of the need. The good news about Jesus resonates well with folks who know the truth about their sin — Statement of Faith 3 in this book.

People need salvation because they need *freedom* from the penalty of their sins, *rescue* from the practice of their sins, and eventual *deliverance* from the very presence and possibility of sin itself.

The italicized words in the previous paragraph are merely three of several close synonyms for *salvation*, this chapter's key word. Others are *redemption*, *liberation*, *victory*, *safety*, and even *health* or *wholeness*. Indeed this Bible word is broad enough to be used for almost any situation in which one is either preserved or recovered from a dangerous threat to body, soul, or spirit.

The dangerous threats to well-being and wholeness in our world are many. For each of these threats there is the sad reality that people suffer and die because the threat has hit its human target. Neither is the non-human portion of the created order exempt from this suffering and death.

All threats against human and universal well-being are named in the Bible as sin, generally, and sins, specifically. People need salvation because therein is comprehended the immediate, ongoing, and ultimate victory over sin — everything that erodes the life, health, and true happiness of people.

The teaching of Scripture is clear and consistent. Unless born again, humanity lives under the curse, enslaved by sin and powerless to be righteous. This sinful state is both a result of man's sinful nature (i.e., original sin) and man's sinful choices (i.e., volitional/willful sin).

Now consider the tragic reality that this sinfulness not only spells hopelessness, enslavement, and misery in this life but also means the condemnation of eternal death for unregenerate humanity. No doubt the punishment on Judgment Day is a horrid and terrifying prospect. It is also eternal and final. Throughout the Bible the final judgment awaiting the unregenerate is one of death and utter destruction (Revelation 21:8).

While the notion of an immortal human soul is popular, we do not believe that Scripture supports it. Nor can we accept the explanation that eternal death is equivalent to eternal torment and conscious separation from God. Eternal torment and conscious separation from God, however miserable and terrible, is still eternal life (immortality), something reserved for those who are saved by Jesus Christ and seek righteousness (Romans 2:7).

Rather, we believe Scripture teaches that man is mortal — body and soul/spirit — and that immortality is only available through Jesus Christ, who is life and has eternal life in Himself (John 14:6; 5:26). Thus we affirm that unregenerate human beings not only suffer the consequences of being enslaved to sin while they live but also are destined to die a physical death followed by final judgment, eternal death, and destruction in the lake of fire.

It is from this enslavement to sin, with all its consequences, that people need salvation. And we have it in Christ.

Part II: Offer of Salvation

In juxtaposition to the tragic picture painted above, we can now offer hope to all mankind in Jesus Christ. Paul writes in Romans 5:8 that “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Earlier in the same letter Paul had written, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes . . .” (1:16).

Just as sin and death spread to all humanity through Adam, so the hope of salvation and resurrection unto eternal life is offered to all through the second Adam, who is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:21, 22; Romans 5:12-19). As Jesus said: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not

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perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16, 17, NKJV). This offer of salvation in Jesus Christ is made available to everyone in the world as foreseen by the prophet Joel and affirmed by Peter and Paul: “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved” (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13).

The apostle John saw the outcome of this offer of salvation to all humanity when he witnessed “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb . . . wearing white robes and . . . holding palm branches in their hands . . . [crying] out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’” (Revelation 7:9, 10). Indeed, God is patient and does not want “anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9b).

Rescue from eternal death; granting of eternal life

We’ve established that the offer of salvation in Jesus Christ is available to all humanity. But what is the nature of this salvation? In its fullness and finality, it is complete rescue from the curse of sin and death. Further, just as the effects of sin and death were both temporal and eternal, so the effects of salvation in Jesus Christ are temporal as well as eternal. That is, those who are not saved are enslaved to sin in this life (temporal consequences) and are condemned to destruction after death (eternal consequences). However, those who have accepted the salvation offered in Jesus Christ receive forgiveness of sins and true righteousness in this life (temporal benefits), as well as the promise of resurrection and eternal life after death (eternal benefits). Let us consider these benefits individually.

In this life those who are saved benefit by having their sins forgiven and by being granted true righteousness. Forgiveness of sins is possible only through Jesus, who “was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people” (Hebrews 9:28). No other sacrifice could bring remission of sins, but in Christ the true Passover lamb has been slain (1 Corinthians 5:7) and total cleansing from sins has been granted. As

Isaiah beautifully prophesied, “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him . . . and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5, 6).

This forgiveness of sins is accompanied by the reception of true righteousness from God. Human attempts at righteousness fall utterly short of God’s standards (Isaiah 64:6; Matthew 5:20), but in Jesus Christ our sins are exchanged for God’s righteousness, as Paul writes, “God made him who had no sin [Jesus] to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Thus the new creation in Christ Jesus is washed clean of sins and grows into a godly spiritual being (vv. 14-20; 1 John 1:9).

Along with forgiveness of sins and granting of true righteousness in this life, the redeemed person is assured of a bright and eternal future in the next. Like faithful Abraham, the redeemed are “looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10). This city, the New Jerusalem, is described as a place where God will dwell with human beings, where they will be His people and He will be their God. There “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. . . . Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Revelation 21:4, 27).

Words fail to express the glory of this eternal home, where those who have trusted in Christ for salvation “will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). While believers must await their eternal home, they are granted eternal life when they are born again of the Spirit.

Jesus Christ conveys His life into the unregenerate person and gives that person His own eternal life (John 5:26; 14:6). Thus we can know

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with confidence that those who believe on Jesus Christ and accept Him by faith have eternal life because “this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life . . . I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:11-13).

Part III: Means of Salvation

Solely by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ

Unregenerate human beings are utterly sinful and condemned to eternal death. God, in Christ Jesus, offers them forgiveness and cleansing from sin and a share in His eternal life and kingdom. How do people avail themselves of God’s salvation offer? Scripture teaches that a person moves from sinfulness to forgiveness, from death to life, by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ. As Paul says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no man can boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9; cf. Romans 5:1, 2).

What do the words *grace* and *faith* mean? *Grace* is the unmerited favor, or gift, of God that is bestowed on unworthy humanity in His gracious acts — chiefly in the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Romans 3:23, 24). Jesus is the one who was “full of grace and truth” and through whom “grace and truth” came to humanity (John 1:14, 17).

As sin and death came on all through Adam, so the gift of grace is offered to all in Jesus Christ (Romans 5:15, 16). All that people can do to receive this grace is to place faith in Jesus Christ and confess it. *Faith* means “trust” or “belief.” Thus faith in Jesus Christ means that we believe that He was who He claimed to be, that His death and resurrection were the means by which He offered His grace to humanity, and that through believing in Him and accepting His sacrifice on our behalf, we are saved from our sins and given eternal life. As Paul writes, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in

your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Romans 10:9, 10).

Apart from human merits, works, or ceremonies

The notion of free, undeserved grace received simply through faith is unbelievable to many. They insist that human merits, works, or ceremonies must be involved in the process of salvation. But Scripture clearly asserts that God’s grace is received through faith, completely apart from human merit, works, or ceremonies.

Paul tells Timothy that God “has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:9, 10). He tells the Ephesians “it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Indeed, we have seen that man was utterly sinful and debased, dead in trespasses and sins. How could he possibly have merited or worked to attain salvation?

Thus there is no merit, work, or ceremony prescribed in Scripture that is required for salvation. Indeed, when people attempt to be justified in God’s sight or “earn” their salvation through human work, merit, or ceremony, attempted apart from God’s free gift of salvation by grace through faith, their deeds are offensive and worthless to God (see Isaiah 1:10-20; Galatians 3:1-5). Grace is not grace if it is awarded for work (Romans 11:6); thus salvation, which is only available through grace, cannot be earned. To be sure, good works are a

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beautiful and necessary expression of loving obedience to God and are the joy, duty, and destiny of those who have been saved (Exodus 20:6; Deuteronomy 11:1; John 14:15; 1 John 5:3; Ephesians 2:10). However, they are a response to and a result of, not a means to or a cause of, the free salvation found in Jesus Christ.

Part IV: Provision for Salvation

Atonement for sins through Christ's death

It has been established that Christ's death is the means by which His grace is offered to humanity for the forgiveness of sins. But how did His death accomplish such a grand purpose? In God's covenant with the children of Israel, He appointed a Day of Atonement each year when animals were sacrificed for the people's sins, and when the high priest sprinkled the animal's blood before the mercy seat in the Holy Place of the tabernacle (Leviticus 16). This was to be a solemn day of fasting and mourning as the people faced the awful reality of their sins and the righteous judgment of God that demanded death. Each year this ceremony reminded the people of their sins, but it could never bring remission and removal of their sins and guilt (Hebrews 10:1, 2). As the writer of Hebrews says, "Those sacrifices [on the Day of Atonement] are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (vv. 3, 4).

However, the sacrifice that Jesus, the great high priest and perfect lamb, made on behalf of humanity did provide true remission and removal of sin and guilt (9:11-28). Because of its perfection and completeness, Jesus' sacrifice needed to be offered only once: "When this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God" (10:12). Thus Christ's death provides atonement and propitiation for the sins of humanity (Romans 3:25, 5:11; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 4:10). As John says, "Jesus Christ, the Righteous One . . . is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1b, 2).

Eternal life through Christ's resurrection

While forgiveness of sins is provided by Christ's atoning sacrifice — that is, His death — His resurrection provides for eternal life (Romans 5:10). Had the Author of Life remained dead, there would be no hope for eternal life. And as Paul says, our faith, hope, and preaching would be in vain (1 Corinthians 15:12-19). But because Christ is risen, He grants resurrection life to all who belong to Him (vv. 20-23), all who have been saved by His grace. The one who has placed his faith in Jesus Christ has died to sin, having been raised in newness of life to God (Romans 6:4).

Paul beautifully describes this movement from death to life (John 5:24b): "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Paul rejoices in the reality that "If we have been united with him [Jesus] like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection" (Romans 6:5) and assures us that "if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you" (8:11). Praise be to our Lord Jesus Christ who "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (4:25).

It should be remembered that the eternal life we enjoy in this earthly journey is the eternal life granted to our spirit (1 John 5:11-13). Meanwhile, our earthly bodies continue to decay and suffer the effects of sin and death in this world. However, at the resurrection we will receive a new and incorruptible body (1 Corinthians 15:42-53) that will enjoy all the wonderful, unimaginable benefits of eternal life (Revelation 21:4). What a glorious day that will be!

We cannot fully grasp what God has prepared for us, yet Scrip-

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ture gives us a glimpse into this magnificent future of forever. We are told that we will know God as He currently knows us (1 Corinthians 13:12). We know that when this occurs —when He is fully revealed to us by our seeing God as He truly is, without the marring of this world’s brokenness — we will be utterly transformed into His image, partaking of His divine nature (1 John 3:2). We know that we will be reunited forever with all those who have believed on Him for salvation (Revelation 7:9, 10; 21:24) and we will live with Him forever (1 Thessalonians 5:10; Revelation 21—22).

Part V: Reception of Salvation

By faith in Christ

As mentioned before, salvation is received solely by grace through faith. Let us address ourselves in more depth now to this issue of faith. In Scripture we read that *without* faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6), but that *with* faith nothing will be impossible to him who believes (Matthew 17:20). To have faith in Jesus Christ is to fully accept and trust Him personally, believing in what Scripture teaches about His identity and mission, and the benefits of His death and resurrection. Placing faith in a different Christ or different gospel brings eternal condemnation (Galatians 1:6-9).

Furthermore, faith in Christ is no simple matter of mental assent to a list of statements about Christ. Indeed, demons have such faith, but it is of no benefit to them (Mark 1:24; James 2:19). Rather, saving faith in Jesus Christ is substantial and evidenced by outward signs (Hebrews 11:1). As James says, “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:17). We demonstrate the genuine nature of faith through our action.

The appropriate actions that accompany faith and evidence its genuine nature are found in Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16, 17), guiding the believer into a life of holiness, righteousness, and obedience to God. These include obedience to the two great commandments, the foundation of God’s law (Matthew 22:37-40), particularly to the Ten

Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) and to the numerous commands of Christ and the apostles that direct not only the actions of believers but also their attitudes and motives (Matthew 5—7; Galatians 5:16-26, et al).

By repentance from sin

The actions that evidence the genuine nature of faith are referred to in Scripture as good works and are the fruit of repentance. Repentance is a process of turning from one viewpoint and corresponding set of behaviors to another. In other words, repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of action. When individuals recognize their dead, sinful state and see that their only hope for forgiveness and eternal life rests in Jesus Christ's grace, their minds must change. They must stop accepting their sin and reject it as evil and offensive to God. And they must stop rejecting Jesus and accept and trust Him for salvation and righteousness. Thus, rejection of sin and genuine trust in Christ for salvation is the first act of repentance that a person undergoes.

It is this change of the mind that embraces the benefit of God's grace and is sufficient for receiving His salvation. John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2); Jesus (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Revelation 2:5, 16); Peter (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 2 Peter 3:9); and Paul (Acts 17:30; 20:21; 26:20) all preached a gospel of faith evidenced by repentance. As believers mature, their increasing faith in Christ will be accompanied and demonstrated by increasing repentance, while their minds are continuously renewed and their actions continuously transformed from ungodliness and wickedness to Christlikeness (Romans 12:2). However, we must not think of this ongoing repentance as solely of individual volition. Rather, just as salvation was by grace through faith and empowered by the Spirit, so the ongoing process of growth

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and repentance in the believer's life (i.e., sanctification) is one of grace through faith by the power of the Spirit (Romans 2:4; Galatians 3:1-5).

Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, except where noted.

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Statement of Faith 5

The Church

The church of God in Scripture is a spiritual body of believers who hold the faith of Jesus and keep the commandments of God. Under the lordship of Christ and the authority of His Word, the church exists universally and locally for purposes of worshipping God, preaching the gospel, nurturing believers, and serving humanity. Christians should participate in the church's mission by service to others and fellowship with believers.

The language and concept of the church is rich in meaning, varying with the times and cultures. Unique experiences give the word *church* added personal significance for many. Churches have been led and frequented by all sorts of people — many noble and faithful, others embarrassing or even reprehensible, resulting in behaviors ranging from heroic self-sacrifice for the church to intense opposition.

Our challenge here is to describe God’s church from His perspective. What does His Word say about His church? Who is part of it? Why does it exist? When and where can it be found? How should it function? And how can we know if we belong?

Words and meanings

Two primary theories exist for the origin of the English word *church*. One traces through *chirche* (Middle Ages English) to *cirice* (Old English) and back to *kyriakon* (possessive form of the Greek word *kurios*, meaning “lord” or “master”). This thought stresses the truth that the church is “of the Lord.” It belongs to Him.

The other theory refers to the Latin word *kirk* that is related to the Greek word *kuklos*, meaning “circle.” Putting the two early meanings together results in the concept of a group of God’s people gathered in a circle.

The word in the Greek text that stands behind *church* in our English versions is *ecclesia*. It is a combination of two Greek words *ek* (“out of”) and *kaleo* (“called”). Thus *ecclesia*, or *church*, means simply “called-out ones.”

Translators of the New Testament into English chose the words *church* or *assembly* when they read the word *ecclesia* in the Greek text. *Ecclesia* can refer to a secular gathering of called-out people, as in Acts 19:32. Of its 118 occurrences, however, it most often describes a gathering of God’s people for worship and fellowship.

As a working definition for our purpose, we may say that the church is an assembly of persons who have been called out of the world by the doctrine of the gospel to worship the true God in Jesus Christ, according to His Word.

Origin and history

The idea of *ecclesia* precedes both the word and the Greeks who used it. It originated with God himself. Taking the initiative, He fellowshipped with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:8ff).

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), *ecclesia* is the word used for the English *assembly* or *congregation*. This *ecclesia* of God's people is referred to nearly seventy times from Genesis through Malachi, as God met with Israel and the saints of old. Examples include meeting to receive the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 9:10), to dedicate the temple (1 Kings 8:65), and to hear Ezra read the book of the law (Nehemiah 8:1-3).

The church takes on its New Testament form and function in the book of Acts. There it is reborn by the Holy Spirit's infusion on the Day of Pentecost, nurtured and edified by the continued work of the Spirit, opposed and persecuted by enemies (both religious and secular), and edified and increased by the grace of its Lord.

These were years of phenomenal growth, when the church remembered both its origin and its identity. It existed as the church of God, not forgetting that it belonged to Him. It carefully guarded its identity as comprising those who looked to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Over 100 times in the New Testament, the word *church* refers to this growing group of God's people in Christ who, in a spiritual sense, turned the world upside down through the gospel.

Unhappy developments in the subsequent history of God's church have distorted and damaged its reputation and our mental image of it. Despite Paul's plea that Christians in Corinth all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among them (1 Corinthians 1:10), church history is rife with schism.

First Timothy 3:15 calls the church "the pillar and ground of the truth." But history reveals a church bogged down and preoccupied

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with heresies. The Scripture teaches only one church (Ephesians 4:4, 5). Yet its oneness is not easy to see through the spiritual dimming of the Dark Ages and the plethora of today's denominations. Reforms and counter-reforms, corruption and compromise, pandering and politicking — on and on goes the sad tale of churches and their members who have traded the Great Commandment and Great Commission for great confusion.

Modern identity

With the structures of Christendom ever in flux and turbulence, how can God's church be identified in today's world? Statistics reveal people flocking away from churches, especially in Europe and North America. Mega-churches and house-churches are popular, while main-line churches and other Christian groups report declining memberships. Denominational loyalty appears to be on the wane.

Those who seek the reality of a fellowship anchored in Christ's grace and truth should look back to church basics. After repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Spirit, those first Christians launched their practice. According to Acts 2:42, it consisted of 1) the apostles' doctrine: God's church remains true to God's Word; 2) fellowship: people need to worship together, to be supportive and accountable to others; 3) breaking of bread: brethren in Christ should interact socially and share meals; 4) prayers: believers should communicate with the Head of the church. A church with these characteristics is likely to get its purpose, priorities, preaching, and practice right.

Most churches in Bible times met in homes, though the phenomenon of separate structures devoted mostly to Christian assembly and worship soon appeared in the church's history. Assembly of all believers in a large city could produce not just hundreds but thousands in one place (Acts 4:4). The beauty of Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," is offered to balance the limitations of larger settings. Jesus' words do not teach ideal church size but do provide assurance of His presence regardless of the size.

The value of small-group settings for one-on-one sharing of the Christian gospel and spiritual fellowship is obvious. Members are

urged to use friendship as a tool of evangelism all week long. On Sabbaths small groups of saints gather for celebration and edification — building each other up. When doors open at meeting's end, the refreshed saints scatter to let those in their part of the world know and see the Savior.

Metaphors of the church

The New Testament often compares the church to a body, a building, and a bride.

The church is like a body (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:23; 4:12; Colossians 1:24; 2:19). This comparison accents the role of Jesus Christ as the head of all Christians, the assortment of roles that various members play within the one body, and the importance of mutual care and interaction of all members with each other.

The church is like a building (Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 3:13-17; Ephesians 2:19-22; and 1 Peter 2:5-8). This metaphor presents Jesus Christ as the foundation and chief cornerstone, the apostles and prophets as foundation stones, and all the members as living stones used to build up a holy temple to the Lord.

The church is like a bride (Ephesians 5:22-32; Revelation 19:7). In this comparison, the devotion and sacrificial love of Christ for God's people is stressed, as well as their submission and respect for the one who laid down His life for them.

The Bible uses many terms to describe God's people. Peter, for example, gives this impressive list: "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9). Other descriptors include the redeemed, the saved, the elect, children of God, Christians, the faithful, believers, saints, servants, and brethren.

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The concept of church incorporates all of these. It identifies the spiritual body of believers God has called out of sin and into His family through His Son Jesus Christ. Or, as Peter says in the same verse, “that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

Members of God’s church are compared to . . .

- sheep (John 10:1-18) – They know the Shepherd’s voice and they follow Him.
- branches (John 15:1-8) – By their connection to and dependence on the vine, they bear much fruit.
- stones (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5) – Positioned in the building by the blueprints of the Cornerstone, they strengthen the entire structure.
- body parts (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) – For a healthy body, each part depends on and cooperates with all other parts.

These metaphors of the interrelationship between Christ and His church stress how each member is to submit to Christ and cooperate with one another.

Requisites for membership

- Not time or place: God’s people — His church — have existed in every age, wherever men and women, boys and girls, have trusted and obeyed His revealed Word. The church of God has neither chronological nor geographical limitations.
- Not lineage or nationality: John the Baptist warned his audience not to boast of being Abraham’s children (Luke 3:8). The great multitude of Revelation 7:9, 10 includes the saved from every nation. God’s people credit their salvation to God and the Lamb, without regard to gender, ethnic, or national background.
- Not power or position: The apostle Paul says it best: “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Corinthians 1:26, NKJV).
- Not perfect knowledge or flawless conduct: If membership in God’s church were contingent upon having correct knowledge

about all matters and proper behavior in all details, then membership could never be certain. A haunting fear that we haven't known enough or done well enough would always remain.

Each of these, plus all other man-made additions, has served to divide Christians and encourage feelings of superiority and pride, giving false hope. God provided a better criterion for being in His church. Jesus proclaimed, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6; see also Acts 4:12). He also said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35, NKJV).

Membership is contingent upon turning toward Jesus as Savior and Lord (faith) and turning away from sins (repentance). That's how one joins God's church. New converts are baptized as an outward expression of the inner change already experienced through the Spirit's work.

Paradoxical nature

It is interesting to note the various ways that the church is experienced:

- It is both universal and local. Jesus suggested this in the only two Gospel texts where He used the word *ecclesia*. He had the universal church in mind when He said, "On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18, NKJV). He had the local church in mind in His teaching about handling offenses: "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church . . ." (18:17).
- It is both divine and human. Because the church belongs to God and because its members' names are written in heaven, the church is a divine institution. On the other hand, it is also fully

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human, as are all its members. None have become fully righteous, and none have yet been glorified to immortality.

- It is both organization and organism, visible and invisible. The invisible organism called the “church of God” is known only to Him (2 Timothy 2:19a). It is a spiritual body composed of all peoples who have accepted God’s gift of salvation in all ages. Their names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, not necessarily on an earthly church roll. Local churches on earth, on the other hand, are quite visible, and they are organized — as are the wider groupings known as denominations. A congregation of believers who worship and serve together in one locale, submissive to Christ’s headship, may unwittingly enroll some who are not true followers. It is, nonetheless, a true representative of God’s church (Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43).

The church today is Jesus Christ at work on earth, its members living so that Christ is appealing and attractive, and ministering in such a way that His mission is accomplished.

Members double-described

The Bible’s last book contains a twofold, double-edged description of the followers of Jesus Christ who make up His church:

- In Revelation 12:17: “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”
- And in Revelation 14:12: “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”

Both texts describe God’s people as those who give evidence of Christian authenticity by faith and by obedience. They trust in Jesus as Savior and obey Him as Lord.

These two essentials are described in other texts as “faith” and “works.” Paul blends both together in Ephesians 2:8-10. Works without faith produces death. Faith without works is dead, according to James 2:14-26. Both faith and works are vital to the operation

of God’s church and to each member in it. Second Timothy 2:19 (NKJV) alludes to both essentials: “The Lord knows those who are His,” so we trust Him; and “Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity,” so we obey Him.

Church names, structure, officers

The New Testament refers to the church most often (eleven times) by the phrase “church of God” (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Timothy 3:5). Other usages, such as “churches of Christ” (Romans 16:16, NKJV), “church of the firstborn” (Hebrews 12:23, NKJV), and “church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15, NKJV) are found one time each.

The name of the organized church should not be seen as a badge of exclusive identity but as a working, legal title that reflects the most common name in Scripture. It should be noted that the label of a thing does not always accurately describe its contents.

The structure of the New Testament church is simple but not prescribed in detail. In addition to the offices and functions described therein, the Holy Spirit evidently anticipated more structure would be needed to serve the cause of Christ and His disciples as their numbers and their ministries increased. This potential for the church to develop infrastructure as it grew is illustrated in the selection of the seven to “wait on tables” in Acts 6:1-6, thus leaving the apostles free for ministry, the Word, and prayer.

Christ is the head of the church, His bride, for whom He died and will return: “He is the head of the body, the church . . .” (Colossians 1:18, NKJV).

The human officers of the Church are . . .

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- its elders, appointed or selected in every congregation (Acts 14:23). Their duties are primarily of a pastoral nature: to feed the church, to oversee its mission and the spiritual welfare of its members (Acts 20:28-32). Further description of the elders' (or bishops') duties, and the qualifications for this office, are in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.
- its deacons, chosen for special service in each congregation. The deacons' duties are not as well defined as the elders'. They seem to have been assigned a variety of ministry and business tasks to relieve the elders for the ministry of the Word and prayer. The qualifications of deacons are listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

The members of the church are each responsible for using their unique spiritual gifts to edify the entire body (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12—14; Ephesians 4:11-16).

Acts and the Epistles describe a people who assembled for public worship. Those recognized as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are responsible for equipping all saints to work in the ministry for edification of the Body (Ephesians 4:11-16). All came offering their spiritual gifts in cooperation with the others so that everyone was served, including a world in need of the Savior. With every believer playing his/her part in this gospel priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), the church becomes the medium by which God invites the lost to Himself through Christ, and nurtures them to maturity as disciples of the Lord.

Mission and vision

The Church of God (Seventh Day) has a four-part mission statement. It exists to

- proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ;
- serve humanity and introduce people to the Lord;
- teach them to worship Him and obey His Word;
- nurture spiritual growth in all believers.

We believe this mission will be best achieved as the Church becomes Christ-centered, distinct but not exclusive, Sabbath-observing, Spirit-formed, Bible-based, passionate in worship, compassionate in service,

aggressive in witness, strong in fellowship, and committed to discipleship.

Conclusion

The faithful church takes seriously Christ's commission to go and make disciples of all the weary and scattered masses of people. The church is the place for sinners to find warm, sincere acceptance from Christians who will challenge them to experience forgiveness through the Savior. It is where those coming to Christ will find a family to cherish them and nurture their newfound faith. The church will invite them to serve, provide opportunities for them to discover and utilize God-given abilities and strengths, and be available to fully incorporate and assimilate them into the family of God.

The church is the place for the redeemed to be nurtured into greater Christlikeness. It is where all may receive instruction in truth as the Word is taught and preached. It is where they will be trained to assist in carrying out the Great Commission. In the midst of a thirsty, selfish world, the church is an oasis where acceptance, encouragement, and support are offered and received. In the midst of a tired, busy world, the church is where peace and rest are a blessed reality. In a lonely world, the church offers the rare gift of genuine fellowship.

As members of this Christian body, let each of us commit ourselves to becoming all that God requires His church to be. May His Word be our sole authority for faith and conduct. May His grace be our praise and motivation for all that's done. May Christ alone — crucified, risen, reigning, returning — be trusted for salvation, by a faith that works through love. May we be content to be unseen as long as Jesus is lifted up and God glorified.

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version, except where noted.

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Statement of Faith 6

*Christian
Ordinances*

Christ prescribed two ordinances that confirm faith in Him: 1) water baptism, preceded by a confession of faith in Christ and repentance, represents the believer's initial union with Christ by depicting death to sin, burial by immersion in water, and rising to a Spirit-controlled life; and 2) Lord's Supper, a memorial to Christ's atoning death.

Believers commemorate Christ's death by eating the bread of communion and drinking from its cup, symbols of His broken body and shed blood, thus demonstrating fellowship with our Savior until He returns. It is accompanied by the washing of feet.

We observe this Supper annually in the season it was instituted and are charitable toward those who observe it at other times.

Baptism

Origin of Christian baptism

Christian baptism traces its origin to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ and to His Great Commission teaching.

To set an example for those who followed Him, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River at the start of His public ministry. As John, that notable prophet who prepared the way for Messiah, preached “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near,” multitudes went down to hear him, to confess their sins, and to be baptized by him in the Jordan (Matthew 3:1-6).

Jesus of Nazareth came also among the crowds to be baptized by John, but He had no sins to confess. Knowing this, John was reluctant to perform the service for Him. “Let it be so now,” Jesus replied; “it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented to our Lord’s request. As Christ exited the river, the Holy Spirit came upon Him like a dove and a voice from heaven declared God’s pleasure in His beloved Son (vv. 15-17).

Early in His ministry, Jesus and His closest followers made and baptized even more disciples than John (John 4:1; v. 2 adds that it was His disciples, not Jesus, who actually baptized).

Following His death and resurrection at the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus instituted baptism as part of the process of making and instructing disciples. He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19, NKJV). Beginning there, baptism became the normal practice for Christian converts.

Significance of baptism

Baptism in water graphically expresses the new disciple’s connection with the cleansing, redemptive work of Jesus at the cross. This connection is developed in a few key passages from the New Testament Epistles. Water baptism for the believer, these texts insist, is

closely linked to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. These three gospel events are essential if baptism is to have any meaning.

Our Lord's apostles recognized the relationship between the symbol of baptism and the reality of salvation, as we shall now see.

1. It expresses faith.

Paul taught that baptism confirms one's faith in the redemption provided by Christ on the cross. He wrote, "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:3, 4).

Our decision to participate symbolically in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ by baptism confirms our confidence in the message that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day . . ." (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4). These are the primary and basic facts of the Christian gospel.

By being immersed and coming up again from beneath the water, we offer dramatic testimony that we believe Jesus was crucified, buried, and raised in our behalf, thus paying the price for our redemption from sin. Baptism confirms the believer's confession that "Jesus is Lord" and the belief that God raised Him from the dead (Romans 10:9).

2. It signifies rebirth.

In Romans 6, Paul also compares Christian baptism with our resurrection to new life in Christ: "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (v. 4).

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This marvelous verse describes the spiritual renewal that occurs in the life of those who, following faith and repentance, are baptized into Christ. Paul implies here that repentance from sin can be compared to a death — the death of our “old man” with Christ, who died for our sins on the cross. When death occurs, burial follows. This compares to our baptism in water. The fact that one is immediately raised from the water, then, symbolizes returning from the grave in which he was buried.

3. It symbolizes cleansing.

Some texts suggest a link between Christian baptism and the washing away of sins in the life of the new believer. Two of these texts are sometimes misunderstood to teach that sins are actually washed away in the waters of baptism. In concluding his sermon at Pentecost, Peter appeals for his hearers to repent and be baptized in Jesus’ name “for the remission of sins . . .” (Acts 2:38, NKJV). And Paul is exhorted by Ananias to “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (22:16, NKJV).

Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that sins against God are washed clean only by His grace to us through the blood of Christ — never by water alone. Peter’s words may be read as an appeal to be baptized “because of” the remission of sins, and Paul’s sins were washed away “in the name of the Lord,” not by water. This fits Peter’s explanation that the meaning of baptism in salvation is “not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God” (1 Peter 3:21, NKJV).

Thus baptism in water is an outward symbol of the inward cleansing already accomplished by the gracious love of Christ for His own people (see Ephesians 5:25-27).

4. It depicts entry into the church.

We become children of God only by faith in Christ (John 1:12; Galatians 3:26), and only the Spirit of God can baptize us into His body (1 Corinthians 12:13). Thus faith may be called the invisible door to the church because only God recognizes faith unerringly; it

may not be quickly obvious to others. The same is true of the Spirit's work to place us among the redeemed in Christ Jesus.

Water baptism, on the other hand, is visible and intended to be seen by others. In this unique way, a new believer says, "Jesus is my personal Savior and Lord. I'm His disciple now." Through this public witness, the church receives the believer into its fellowship.

Paul describes those who were baptized into Christ as having a new identity as sons of God and a new relationship in the spiritual body of Christ. Through faith in Christ and baptism by water and the Spirit, they are clothed with Christ to become His body (Galatians 3:27).

The entry of baptized believers into the church is observed in Acts 2:41, 47: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. . . . And the Lord added to their number [the church] daily those who were being saved."

Baptism in the early church

The first water baptisms administered by the early church occurred following Peter's sermon to a large crowd gathered in Jerusalem. Just before His ascension, Jesus reminded the disciples of John's prophecy that there would come One who would baptize in the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33), saying, "John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). This promise was fulfilled about ten days later on the Day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2.

To those who sought explanation for the unusual events of that day, Peter declared that Jesus had been raised from the dead, exalted to the right hand of God, and was now pouring out the promised Holy Spirit. His explanation that "God has made this Jesus, whom you

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crucified, both Lord and Christ” (v. 36) convinced his audience to put their faith in Jesus. Deeply convicted, they inquired, “Brothers, what shall we do?” When Peter told them, “Repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins,” three thousand souls obeyed his words (vv. 37-41)!

Many more baptisms are recorded in the book of Acts, demonstrating the prominent role of this ordinance in the life of the early church:

- Samaritan believers were baptized in the name of Jesus, probably by Philip (8:12ff).
- The Ethiopian eunuch, en route home from Jerusalem, was baptized by Philip (8:36-40).
- After his dramatic conversion on the Damascus road, Saul of Tarsus was baptized by Ananias (9:17, 18).
- Cornelius and other Gentiles were baptized, probably by Peter (10:48).
- Lydia with her household and the jailer with his household were all baptized in Philippi (Acts 16:14, 15, 32, 33).
- Certain disciples who had experienced John the Baptist’s baptism were re-baptized, at Paul’s counsel, “into the name of the Lord Jesus” (19:5).

All these baptisms were in obedience to the Great Commission of the Lord, recorded in Matthew 28:19, 20.

Water baptism, Spirit baptism

Throughout the book of Acts, baptism in water (administered by believers) is closely associated with baptism in the Holy Spirit (administered by Christ). On the Day of Pentecost, Peter instructed his hearers, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38, 39).

From this point onward, water baptism and Spirit baptism are closely related, though not identical:

- As Philip evangelized the Samaritans, many of them were converted and baptized in water. Peter and John soon came from Jerusalem, laid hands on them, and prayed that they would receive the Holy Spirit (8:12-17).
- After Saul’s miraculous conversion near Damascus, Ananias was sent to lay his hands on him to receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Upon this experience, Saul arose and was baptized (9:17, 18).
- At Cornelius’ house the baptism in the Spirit preceded water baptism, and was integrally related to it (10:44-48; 11:15-17).
- In Acts 19 Paul asked some disciples about their baptism and if they had received the Holy Spirit since. When he explained the difference between John’s baptism and baptism into Christ Jesus, they consented to be baptized in Jesus’ name — after which Paul laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit (19:3-6).

These four examples demonstrate the close link between water baptism and Spirit baptism. In two cases the reception of the Spirit preceded baptism in water; that order is reversed in the other two. From this evidence we may conclude that both water baptism and baptism in the Spirit were normative in the church, though the latter’s manifestations are not fully uniform.

Those who trust in Jesus Christ should be baptized in water. Further, they can be assured that He baptizes them with the Spirit, for that promise is to “all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (2:38, 39, NKJV).

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Baptism's form and formula

The Bible teaches that baptism is properly done by submersion in water. The Greek word *baptizo*, from which the English *baptize* is transliterated, is understood to mean “bury, immerse.” This meaning is supported by these descriptions of baptism:

- “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water” (Matthew 3:16).
- “John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water . . .” (John 3:23).
- “Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water . . .” (Acts 8:38, 39).

The most compelling picture of baptism by full immersion is Paul's comparison of it with Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-11). His words perfectly illustrate Christian baptism as a burial — entering into baptismal waters and rising from them again. Generally speaking, sprinkling or pouring water is seen as an improper symbol of one's death, burial, and resurrection with Christ.

Bible students have often debated the proper words to be said by one who officiates at a Christian baptism. The Church of God (Seventh Day) does not prescribe a single formula by which baptisms are to be performed. It considers that converts may be baptized “in the name [by the authority] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19) and/or “in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38). The Church considers these phrases functionally synonymous. Either of them, or some combination of the two, is appropriate for the baptism of Christian converts.

The Church's general practice is that baptisms are officiated by an ordained minister. We also recognize that any Christian might legitimately administer the ordinance for a new convert.

Candidates for baptism

The very nature of the ordinance of baptism requires that its candidates have a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This is seen in the answer to the Ethiopian eunuch who asked what hindered

his being baptized. Philip replied, “If you believe with all your heart, you may” (Acts 8:37a, NKJV). The eunuch then expressed his faith that Jesus Christ is God’s Son, and was baptized (vv. 37b, 38).

This incident illustrates the necessity of a confession of faith in Christ before baptism. Equally important is the need to confess sin and turn from it to the Savior in genuine repentance (2:38).

Faith and repentance, the two requirements for Christian baptism, are experienced and expressed by only those who understand the message of Christ and recognize their sins. Therefore it is inappropriate for infants to be baptized because they are unable to acknowledge faith in Christ, repent of their sins, and knowingly follow Jesus.

Church practice on rebaptism

While baptism in water is a prerequisite to joining the Church of God (Seventh Day), it is not the Church’s practice either to baptize candidates into its membership or to rebaptize those coming from other Christian traditions. Membership in the Church’s organization is encouraged as an option to the new believer being baptized into Christ, but it is not required.

The Church accepts into its fellowship persons who have previously experienced baptism (by immersion) in the name of Jesus. They may place their membership in the Church by profession of faith and desire to participate in its fellowship — without rebaptism.

The comparison of Christian baptism to sharing in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:3ff) implies that it is a one-time experience. Baptism compares to a birth, with growth in grace and knowledge anticipated for all newborns. To be baptized after each step forward in faith would be redundant. The very nature of spiritual growth and development rules out the necessity of rebaptism for those

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who come to a deeper understanding of Scripture. “Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ” (e.g., baptisms and others) “and go on to maturity . . .” (Hebrews 6:1, 2).

However, those baptized as infants should be “re-baptized” once they come to understand its meaning for the first time. Likewise, those who experience sprinkling or pouring for baptism as adolescents or adults are encouraged to be baptized in the proper biblical manner. In neither of these cases would baptism be redundant.

Other legitimate reasons for rebaptism may exist. Any reader who feels a need either for baptism or rebaptism is urged to consult a pastor or minister.

Lord's Supper

The institution of the Lord's Supper, the time of its observance, and its memorial symbols are remembrances of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. It is a fellowship of the assembled church with Christ and with one another.

The Lord's Supper was instituted on the night of Jesus' betrayal as a memorial to His death that would occur the next day. These evening events took place in an upper room in Jerusalem, where Christ had gathered to share the annual Passover meal with His disciples.

As they were eating together in memory of ancient Israel's deliverance from Egypt under Moses, Jesus Christ introduced a new memorial for them. Breaking the unleavened bread of Passover, He distributed it and asked the Twelve to eat, explaining that the bread represented His body given for them. Then He blessed the Passover cup and asked them to drink its fruit of the vine, saying it represented His blood that would be shed for the remission of sins.

Slightly varying accounts of this event are recorded in three Gospels (Matthew 26:20-30; Mark 14:17-26; Luke 22:14-22) and again in Paul's writing (1 Corinthians 11:23-34).

Memorial with meaning

The significance of the Lord's Supper memorial is found in the meaning assigned to its emblems. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul all agree that the bread is a symbol of Jesus' body and that the cup is a symbol of His blood (see John 6:53-58). "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup," Jesus instructed them, "you will proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Do this in remembrance of Me" (paraphrase of Luke 22:19, 20 and 1 Corinthians 11:24-26).

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Thus, eating the bread and drinking from the cup remind those who participate of the importance of Jesus' sacrifice for sins, made on Calvary's cross (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18, 19).

This commemorative aspect of the Lord's Supper makes it important to every believer. As a memorial to Christ's death, it is a periodic public dramatization of the truth that salvation is obtained through the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, and nowhere else. The Supper's value resides in the heart of every communicant who acknowledges unworthiness to be saved except by the grace of God available only through faith in the crucified and risen Savior (Ephesians 2:4-10).

Table fellowship

Rather than literal body and blood, we understand the bread and cup to be symbolic emblems of believers' ongoing fellowship with their Redeemer, Jesus Christ."

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf (1 Corinthians 10:16, 17).

Here Paul describes the bread and cup of the Lord's Supper as a fellowship of the assembled church, not only with Jesus but also with each other. The words *participation* (NIV) and *communion* (NKJV) come from the Greek *koinonia* (often translated "fellowship"), also used to describe the shared experience of the first church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42).

Sharing the Lord's Supper, then, illustrates and demonstrates the believer's ongoing fellowship with Christ and with others who are in Christ. This comprehends a wide range of spiritual facts and applications, such as Jesus' death for sin as a source of the saints' righteousness (Romans 5:6-8, 19; 2 Corinthians 5:21); the believer's death to sin (Romans 6:1-13); and the saints' confidence in Christ's return (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Foot washing

The fellowship of believers as the body of Christ (i.e., the church) is to be experienced not only in sharing the communion emblems but also in washing the saints' feet.

John 13:1-17 describes how Jesus rose from the communion table to wash the feet of His disciples. When He had finished, He asked:

“Do you understand what I have done for you? . . . You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. . . . Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (vv. 12-15, 17).

Foot washing, as modeled by Jesus and practiced by the Church, illustrates humility, cleansing, and willingness to serve. As saints wash the feet of others, it can be said that they do this unto the Lord himself (see Matthew 25:35-40). Washing the feet of our fellow saints, we graphically demonstrate oneness with Christ in service to His church.

Who may participate?

Two requirements exist for participation in the Lord’s Supper. Communicants should be disciples of Jesus who 1) confess faith in Him and 2) examine themselves with the intent of correcting their faults, especially improper attitudes and actions toward the body and blood of Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

This examination must consider Paul’s reproof of the Corinthian church for poor conduct relating to its Lord’s Supper, recorded in 1 Corinthians 11:17-22. This church’s communion service was ac-

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accompanied by a common meal known as a “love feast.” Paul criticized the church’s behavior at this meal because there were divisions among them (v. 18), because they ate and drank excessively (v. 21), and because the needs of some members were disregarded, leaving them hungry while others became drunk (v. 22). He wrote that the Lord’s Supper could not be observed under these circumstances (v. 20).

In view of these infractions against genuine love, Paul instructed the Corinthians to examine their motives and actions. He considered any disrespectful conduct toward Christ or the members of His church, while approaching the Lord’s table, to be a sin against Jesus’ body and blood. In preparing for the Supper, then, Christians should review their motives and attitudes toward Christ and others so that their conduct will not be marred by selfish indulgence.

Self-examination is not intended to keep Christians from the communion table, but to motivate the saints to make needed corrections in their lives (vv. 31, 32). In reality, none are worthy on their own merit to participate at the Supper table. All must rely on God’s grace for the worthiness needed to celebrate the Lord’s death in this memorial service.

About the emblems

Scripture gives no precise instruction for the emblems to be used in the Lord’s Supper service. Jesus and His disciples were eating the Passover meal when He instituted the Supper, so unleavened bread would have been the only bread on the table. (Passover was also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Matthew 26:17.) Since Jesus broke and gave the disciples unleavened bread to represent His body broken for us, we choose the same emblem in remembrance of Him.

The emblem representing Jesus’ blood is referred to as “the cup” or “the fruit of the vine” (Matthew 26:27; Luke 22:18). Finding no requirement to use wine in the Lord’s Supper service and believing that grape juice is a more responsible and appropriate symbol of Jesus’ blood, the Church of God (Seventh Day) uses grape juice as the symbol of Jesus’ blood.

Perpetual nature

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as a memorial service: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). And Paul wrote, "whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Two conclusions may be drawn from these texts: 1) Jesus intended for the church to remember His death, from the time this ordinance was instituted on the night of His betrayal until the establishment of His kingdom at the Second Advent, by eating the bread and drinking from the cup; 2) As a memorial, the Lord's Supper service may properly be held annually at the time of the event it commemorates — Christ's death.

The Church of God (Seventh Day) chooses to observe this memorial service in the season it was established, specifically at the beginning of the fourteenth day of the month Nisan according to the Hebrew calendar. This date best approximates the evening on which Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper just prior to His betrayal, arrest, and trial leading to His death the next day.

While the Church observes the Lord's Supper annually at the time of the Jewish Passover, it recognizes that this frequency is not commanded in Scripture. The wording in 1 Corinthians 11:26 could be understood to allow for a more frequent celebration of communion or its celebration without regard to dates or seasons. We maintain the importance of this annual celebration in its season for unity's sake. We also respect the celebration of communion by other believers at different times.

Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, except where noted.

Notes

Statement of Faith 7

*The Ten
Commandments*

The Ten Commandments were known and obeyed by faithful people before the law was given at Sinai. Later incorporated into the new covenant by the example and teaching of Christ, they constitute the basic moral code for humanity and are obeyed to demonstrate the believer's love for God and his fellowman.

What's “special” about the Ten?

Before God presented Israel with His codified law at Mt. Sinai, He first made an agreement with them (Exodus 19:5-8). This agreement, or covenant, stated that He would be their God and they would be His treasured people and obey His commandments — a holy nation indeed. The first set of laws given in this context were the Ten Commandments (i.e., the Decalogue), which God spoke to the entire congregation of Israel and to the mixed multitude gathered at Sinai (Exodus 19, 20).

Then God called Moses up into the mountain and presented him two tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments had been written with God's own finger (31:18). The Ten are later called “the covenant” (34:28; Deuteronomy 4:13; 9:9, 11, 15), perhaps because they were the first laws God gave Israelites after their mutual agreement and/or because the Ten were the main items God had in mind for the conduct of His chosen people and that of all others. When God finished speaking the Ten Commandments in the people's hearing, “He added no more” (Deuteronomy 5:22), indicating the completeness of the Decalogue as a unique code of moral law.

The two tablets of stone inscribed with the Ten were then placed inside the ark of the covenant in the Hebrew tabernacle (Exodus 25:16; 32:15; Hebrews 9:4), unlike the other laws of the Sinaitic covenant that were placed beside the ark (Deuteronomy 31:26). This location of the Ten inside the ark had special significance in that the “mercy seat” was placed atop the ark. It was from there that God met with and spoke to Moses, face to face (Exodus 33:11a).

When God ruled Israel as king (1 Samuel 8:7), the mercy seat was His throne (Exodus 25:22). Israel's earthly temple, including the ark of the covenant and its contents, was patterned after eternal realities, heavenly things (Hebrews 8:5; Revelation 11:19). God's will in heaven is also His will for people on earth (Matthew 6:10).

These evidences point to the unique role of the Ten Commandments:

- They were spoken by the Lord as a complete body of law.
- They were written by the finger of God on stone tablets — twice.
- They were the basic constitution by which the LORD ruled Israel.

- They occupied a special place within the ark of the covenant beneath the mercy seat — God’s earthly throne.

The essence of God’s will for human conduct is revealed in the Ten Commandments, in contrast with the other laws given at Mount Sinai that evidently occupied positions of lesser importance in the divine plan. The Ten are simple guides to living and loving (Romans 13:8-10), whereas the book of the law gave warnings and remedies for specific failures to show such love.

Moral law before the mount

The solemn and extraordinary nature of moral standards embodied in the Decalogue is underscored by the fact that none of them was first conceived for the nation of Israel. The Ten Commandments were known and obeyed by faithful people long before “the law” was delivered through Moses at the mount.

The Lord’s testimony about Israel’s forefather, Abraham, shows how the patriarchs and their families had come to their prior knowledge of God’s commands and laws. God says He chose Abraham to be the father of many nations “because Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws” (Genesis 26:5). These categories of instructions reveal the wide range of Abraham’s knowledge of God’s will.

Even before Abraham, God called humanity into account for having the knowledge of good and evil and not living by that knowledge. Witness Cain’s punishment for killing his brother. Witness also the destruction of everyone but Noah and his family because of the great wickedness of man upon the earth. “Every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5).

The knowledge of good and evil was, to some degree, passed on

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innately to all Adam's offspring (Romans 2:14). The ancients before Moses also knew the ways of right and wrong by the Lord's instruction through men like Noah, a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5), and through Abraham (Genesis 18:19). God had instructed humanity with laws, ordinances, and commandments, as seen in His commendation of Abraham (26:5).

This does not imply that somewhere, prior to the Sinaitic covenant, these same ten commands existed verbatim as we know them. We find little evidence of such a prior code of holy law. Rather, we affirm that knowledge of each and responsibility to obey all of them individually were present among people long before the Mosaic era.

All sins, prior to Mount Sinai and since, are generated from ignoring God's instructions. Those sins "from Adam until Moses" (Romans 5:14) included preferring other gods above the one true God and worshipping idols (Joshua 24:14); Sabbath-breaking (Genesis 2:2, 3; Exodus 16, esp. v. 30); disrespect of parents (Noah's son Ham, Genesis 9:22); murder (Cain killed Abel, Genesis 4); adultery (both Abimelech the Canaanite and Joseph the Hebrew knew adultery was sin, Genesis 26:10; 39:8, 9); stealing (31:19); lying (12:11-13; 26:6, 7); and coveting (25:29-34).

This list covers all commandments of the Decalogue except number three — taking the Lord's name in vain. All who claimed to be God's children but didn't obey Him did that (Jeremiah 34:16; Ezekiel 20:9, 14).

Thus we find that all Ten Commandments were known to be God's will before the giving of the law at Mount Sinai and that even Gentiles were held accountable for their disobedient ways. Paul explains why: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them" (Romans 1:18, 19).

Decalogue in the new covenant

We now reach the crucial issue of this chapter: Does the Ten Commandment law that played a primary role in the old covenant under Moses remain undivided and undiminished in its capacity to commu-

nicate the will of God for those who are now believers in and followers of Jesus Christ under the new covenant?

The answer to this question must be found mostly in the New Testament, in the example and teaching of Jesus Christ and His apostles. So as not to ignore major pieces of earlier evidence, however, let us confirm that the Ten were basic to the old covenant, and review the key text in which a Hebrew prophet predicts the coming of a new covenant.

Exodus 20:3-17 embodies a collected review of ten ancient moral principles: the Decalogue. These were the primary expression of God's covenant with Israel and the mixed multitude at the foot of the mount. The first four commandments were fundamental expressions of the Hebrews' love toward God; the last six, of their love toward man.

Much later in the Hebrew Scriptures, as it became evident that Israel was not making a success of the Sinaitic covenant, God inspired the prophet Jeremiah with these words:

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

This passage provides a wonderful preview of the gospel reality

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that comes to those who know God in the free pardon of their sins through Jesus Christ.

In verse 32 of Jeremiah's prophecy, God had said the new covenant would not be like the old. How not?

Jeremiah identified only a single dissimilarity: "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it" (v. 33). The old covenant was written by the Lord on tablets of stone; but the new is written by Him on the tablets of our hearts. This distinction is made and emphasized twice in the newer Scriptures (Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16, 17).

Jeremiah's new covenant prediction contains no intimation of changes in God's moral standards. There were changes in some secondary provisions of the covenant (Hebrews 7:12), but none in its primary principles. So when we come to the New Scriptures, what moral principles did Jesus and the apostles teach as important to life?

The Ten were the primary expression of moral law not only in the Old Scriptures but also in the New. When Christ was asked, "What good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" He replied, "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:16, 17).

The young man asking the question wanted a narrower answer, so he asked which commandments Jesus had in mind. "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," came the reply (vv. 18, 19).

Jesus' answer included five commands from the Decalogue and one not of the Ten. Just as Jesus' quote of the command to love our neighbors does not imply that the command to love God is invalid, neither does quoting only five of the Ten suggest that the other five are obsolete.

Statements of our Lord in the fourth Gospel highlight His opinion of the importance of keeping God's commandments generally (John 14:15; 15:10). Nowhere does Jesus suggest that any of the Ten in particular have been set aside.

The continuing validity of the Ten is shown in Romans 7. Paul

wrote, “I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COVET’” (v. 7). The command not to covet is found only in the Ten and is not part of any other law. Thus Romans 7:7 has broad implications in that the law it quotes served as the definition of sin for Paul. That law is “holy and righteous and good” (v. 12), compelling evidence that the Ten are part of what was to be written on our hearts and minds in the new covenant.

Neither the law nor obeying it is intended to save us, but Christ died in part to enable true obedience. Paul wrote: “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, *so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us*, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:3, 4, emphasis added).

Those who find Paul to be a critic of God’s law need to rethink that conclusion. It is true that the apostle of God’s grace would not allow law — any law — to become the dynamic that brings salvation and eternal life. These are the gifts of God through faith in Jesus Christ alone. This accounts for the several texts in which Paul affirms the law’s limits and warns of Judaizers who would elevate the law to a role it was never intended to play.

On the other hand, Paul often offered support for the moral law of God as a teacher and guide to those who have been justified by faith in Christ. In addition to the Romans texts above, see also 1 Corinthians 7:19 (compared with Ecclesiastes 12:13; Matthew 19:17-19); Ephesians 6:1-3; and 1 Timothy 1:8-11 in which the sin list provides an intriguing parallel with the Ten Commandments spoken at Sinai. The moral law has a perfectly good purpose, Paul says again and again, if we use it lawfully.

James goes a step further than Paul, in verifying the unity of the

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Ten. He writes: “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, “DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,” also said, “DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law” (2:10, 11).

This passage refers directly to the Decalogue, from which two commands are quoted. This “break one, break all” principle could not be said of the book of the law, which commands circumcision and animal sacrifices for sin. These are no longer commands under the new covenant in Christ’s blood.

The writings of John, though more general, harmonize perfectly with Paul and James. John wrote, “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4, KJV; compare that with Paul stating how he knew sin in Romans 7:7). Other verses in which the same apostle states the importance of Christians obeying the commandments of God are 1 John 2:4; 3:22-24; and 5:2, 3.

A survey of New Testament passages in support of the Decalogue would be quite incomplete without Revelation 12:17 and 14:12. These twin verses describe the people of God under the new covenant as having two primary attributes: 1) They live by faith in Jesus Christ and 2) they practice obedience to the commandments of God.

By way of summary, we affirm that the Ten Commandments were incorporated into the new covenant by the example and teaching of Christ:

- Just as God wrote the Ten on the stone tablets, so He does the writing of them on our hearts and in our minds.
- Just as the Ten under the old covenant were only a fraction of that treaty, so it is in the new.
- The example and teachings of Jesus the Christ all support the Decalogue.
- The various statements in which Paul upholds the law include the Ten Commandments in their purview.
- John and James champion the dignity and unity of God’s commandments generally, and the Decalogue in particular.

By “incorporated into,” we do not imply that the commands of the

Decalogue were brought into the new covenant one at a time. Rather, they were brought into it as a recognizable body of law known as “the Commandments.” Jesus referred to them in that manner (Matthew 19:17; John 15:10).

Humanity’s basic moral code

The universality of the Ten Commandments is seen in the fact that God spoke them to the mixed multitude at Mount Sinai, i.e., to Israel and to the non-Israelites who left Egypt with them (Exodus 12:38). It is further seen in this statement of the preacher in Ecclesiastes: “The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person” (12:13).

Fearing God and keeping His commandments is still the duty of all humanity, for “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). All human beings have sinned, and all are held accountable for sins: “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law.” Who is that? The law speaks to all so that “every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Romans 3:19, KJV). “All humanity” and “every mouth” live “under the law,” guilty before God for transgressing His moral law — unless and until they are saved through the forgiveness of sins, covered by Christ’s blood.

Paul, apostle to the Gentiles, answered a basic question about the law’s validity: “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (Romans 3:31, KJV). Since he, an Israelite, was the apostle to the Gentiles, his instructions about the law are valid for both Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus, the Savior and Teacher of all men, places a final approval on the continuity of God’s moral law in the Torah when He proclaims:

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“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil” (Matthew 5:17, KJV).

Law of love

It is important to note the times and places in which New Testament Scriptures associate the commandments of God with our love for Him and His love for us.

Jesus said of the commands to love God with our whole being and to love our neighbors as ourselves, “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40). This truth reveals the purpose of God’s laws and instructions through the prophets: They teach us how to love Him and each other.

Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” and “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 14:15; 15:10). Obedience shows our love for Him, and He responds to our loving obedience with the assurance of His own indwelling love.

Paul wrote:

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF” (Romans 13:8, 9).

All of God’s instructions for man, then, are to help us express love.

John wrote, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:2, 3).

How different these texts sound from the common view that God’s law is somehow against us, contrary to the ways of love, a burden that puts us under the bondage of fear. On the contrary, loving and obeying God in response to His redeeming love for us releases us from fear

and from the destructive consequences of sin. Love is not burdensome; it is helpful, encouraging, and pleasing — not an added load to carry. All ten commands of God’s moral law are primary expressions of love — both His love for us and ours for Him.

Summary

We began with these premises: “The Ten Commandments were known and obeyed by faithful people before the law was given at Sinai,” that “they later were incorporated into the new covenant by the example and teaching of Christ,” that “they constitute the basic moral code for humanity” and “are obeyed to demonstrate the believer’s love for God and his fellowman.” We have shown the soundness of those beliefs with ample scriptural verification.

That the Ten “constitute the basic moral code for humanity” is further verified by the statements of our Lord, His apostles and prophets, their condemnation of the very conduct that is causing the rapid moral decay evident in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The very calamities that God predicted would come on His people for violating His commandments have descended upon our post-modern world.

At the same time, those who obey God’s commands — empowered by His Spirit and strengthened by His grace — enjoy the wonderful benefits of a life lived in holy devotion to God. God’s commandments are not burdensome. Rather, they outline ways in which we demonstrate our love for God and our fellowman. Those who choose this way of love will enjoy all the benefits this earthly life can afford as they experience true fellowship with God and His covenant people. Thus we affirm the perpetuity of the Ten Commandments, not as a rigid moral code but as a way of life that embraces Jesus’ high calling to love God and one another!

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Giving us His commandments verifies God's love for us, even more than our imperfect obedience verifies our love for Him and His Son, Jesus Christ!

Scriptural quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*, except where noted.

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Statement of Faith 8

The Sabbath

The seventh-day Sabbath is God's gift to humanity from Creation, was written into the Ten Commandments by God's finger, was kept and taught by Jesus, and was observed by the apostolic church. A memorial of both Creation and redemption, the Sabbath should be celebrated faithfully by believers now as a day of rest, worship, and well doing.

Origin and significance

God devoted the first six days of Creation to originating and designing the universe with its galaxies, the earth and everything in its air, seas, and dry land — living and non-living. He completed creation by making the human family in His image to have dominion over the earth He had created.

On the seventh day God rested from all His work and made that day holy and sacred, though He was not tired and did not need a rest. Knowing we would need one rest day in every seven, He ceased His work to give humans an example of Sabbath — a day to rest from our toil, celebrate creation, and worship the Creator.

The account of Creation ends with these words:

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made (Genesis 2:1-3).

Observance before Christ

After Creation, the Sabbath is not directly mentioned in the Bible again until Israel had escaped from Egyptian slavery. There, between the Red Sea and Mount Sinai, God began providing manna for Israel, giving instructions about preparation for the Sabbath by gathering enough on the sixth day for both the sixth and the seventh.

When God instructed Israel to gather and prepare double manna on the sixth day, He said He would test Israel, whether she would obey His instruction or not (Exodus 16:4, 5). When some didn't obey, God responded, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions?" (Exodus 16:28). This was before God spoke the Ten Commandments to all Israel and to the "mixed multitude" from Mount Sinai.

God asking "How long do you refuse?" indicates Israel had already known about the Sabbath and was not complying with it. But soon

thereafter, it became part of codified, written law — “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” — because God had rested that day and made it holy (Exodus 20:8-11).

For forty years, God identified the Sabbath weekly by not providing manna on that day. It was forty years of miraculous reminder and identification. The miracle ceased when Israel entered the Promised Land under Joshua’s leadership and began eating food grown in the land (Joshua 5:12).

Thus we find two firm Old Testament anchors for Sabbath — one in the awesome creation itself and another in the rectitude of God’s moral law, the Ten Commandments. Far from being merely Jewish in nature, these anchors hold prime significance for all people, everywhere.

Other ancient references endorsing the validity of God’s Sabbath gift for men are in the Hebrew prophets. In Isaiah 56, the gospel prophet calls both Jews and Gentiles who would pursue God to take hold of His covenant, including the Sabbath (vv. 1-8). Two chapters later, Isaiah commends the Sabbath as a true day of delight and blessing (58:13, 14).

As time passed, however, God’s people became less and less faithful in Sabbath observance. Their forsaking the Sabbath formed part of the reason God sent Israel and Judah into captivity in Assyria and Babylon (see Jeremiah 17:27; Nehemiah 13:18).

These lessons are not irrelevant for Christians under the new covenant gospel. Whether we as believers are or are not willing to obey God’s commands is a measure of our love for Christ (John 14:21; 15:10). Obedience serves as a measure of our devotion to God and is an indicator of whether we know our Lord or not (1 John 2:4).

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Sabbath in the Gospels and Acts

As seen above, Israel's captivity occurred in part because of breaking the Sabbath. Consequently, by the time of Christ's ministry, Jewish leaders had defined exactly how to observe the Sabbath, adding many rules and traditions to interpret God's laws for its observance. These rules deviated significantly from God's Sabbath instructions (Matthew 12:2) by specifying how far one might walk (Acts 1:12) and forbidding works of charity that Christ declared to be lawful (Mark 3:1-5; Luke 13:11-16). Jesus had many discussions with the Pharisees and Sadducees about this matter. He did not set Himself against God's Sabbath command but against this prevailing Jewish tendency to devalue the Sabbath by their focus on a list of mostly negative rules for its observance.

Jesus taught them, for example, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). This saying echoes back to Creation week, when the Creator rested the seventh day not because He was tired but because He knew we would be. If the Sabbath day is for man, as He said, it is not against man. In this saying, Jesus showed no intention to terminate or replace Sabbath rest, fellowship, and worship. But He did intend man to better understand these Sabbath purposes! The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). As its Lord, He has complete authority over it.

We can depend on Jesus' interpretations, one of which was "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:12). By His own declaration, works of mercy on the Sabbath had never been against God's law. By His many healings and gospel teachings on the seventh day, Jesus reformed the Sabbath from its legalism and redeemed it from its bondage. He restored it to its original purpose, for the spiritual and physical good of man.

Jesus' response to the Jews serves to caution us about misapplying Sabbath principles in our day. Have we developed our own traditions that negate true Sabbath observance? Do we distort God's intent of what it means to "keep it holy"? These are good questions to ask before insisting that others conform to our personal practices of Sabbath observance.

In addition to His teachings concerning the Sabbath, Jesus made it His custom to attend synagogue on that day every week (Luke 4:16).

In fellowship with others who feared God, He read from the Scriptures and explained their meanings. He often pointed out prophecies concerning His coming and ministry.

Jesus' customary Sabbath worship activities were continued by the apostles after His death and resurrection. Of the several texts in Acts that speak of this practice, the most compelling is Acts 13:42-44, where we learn that Gentiles also participated in these Sabbath meetings and requested their continuation on the following Sabbath.

Such occasions fulfilled the Lord's prophecy that "the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, every one who keeps from profaning the Sabbath and holds fast My covenant; even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples" (Isaiah 56:6, 7).

That this prophecy refers to the new covenant (as well as to the old) is seen in the reference to God's salvation being "about to come" (v. 1, Christ's death on the cross) and to "foreigners . . . in my house of prayer," confirmed in the Gospels (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46).

Sabbath in the Epistles

The weekly seventh-day Sabbath is mentioned seldom in the last twenty-two New Testament books, which are letters of the apostles. This parallels its absence in the recorded history of Noah and the patriarchs (two thousand years), from Genesis 3 until Exodus 16. Neither silence may be interpreted as evidence that the Sabbath made for all people had lost its purpose or its effect.

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Of the sixty references to Sabbath in the New Testament, only one contains a possibly negative reference to the ongoing sanctity and validity of the weekly seventh day: “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” (Colossians 2:16, 17, NKJV).

Upon closer study of these verses in their context, it can be seen that the writer’s burden here was not to overturn the Creator’s hallowed day of rest and fellowship. Rather, it was to refute the mixed form of Jewish, pagan, and Christian elements threatening the church in Colosse. Paul insisted that any mixture of philosophy (v. 8), religion (v. 16), and asceticism (v. 18) that refused to acknowledge Christ in His rightful place (see esp. vv. 3-7, 9-15, 19) should not be recognized as “Christian,” even if it included a perverted form of Sabbath-keeping in the mix.

On the other hand, the reference to Sabbath rest in the epistle of Hebrews (4:1-11) offers compelling evidence that this writer saw enduring benefit in the weekly rest day as a symbol-sign-figure of the greater rest to which God always calls His people. This paragraph intertwines God’s rest at the end of Creation week and Israel’s repeated failures to enter promised rest (due to unbelief) with the gospel call for today’s believers to find rest in Christ (Matthew 11:28). The text is permeated by thought and promise of ultimate rest to come, of which God’s creation Sabbath remains a true figure. The writer’s conclusion: “There remains therefore a rest [*sabbatismos* — keeping of a Sabbath] for the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9, NKJV).

Type of kingdom rest

Rather than replacing the weekly Sabbath, Hebrews 4 affirms it. However, that chapter’s primary purpose is to draw parallel concepts between the rest of Sabbath observance on one hand and the rest of Israel’s Promised Land — a type of God’s eternal kingdom — on the other.

A “kingdom of God” rest remains to be entered, since rest was not attained by a faithful people entering the Land of Canaan (Hebrews

4:1-6). So the promise remained and remains valid. Believers enter it now through faith (v. 3). The validity of the Hebrews 4 parallel requires both continuing Sabbath observance and continuing entry into God's promised kingdom rest by faith (vv. 4-11).

The implication of the Hebrews 4 passage is that the weekly Sabbath of rest has always played a symbolic role. For the Christian, this symbolic meaning becomes very clear and dear. In our keeping Sabbath, the law requires us to lay down our routine weekly labors just as God did His. The same is true in the gospel: When we come to Christ for forgiveness of sins and the gift of salvation, the gospel requires us to lay down all our hopes of being saved by good works, and to trust in Christ alone. The Sabbath rest, then, is God's day of grace, just as resting in Christ brings us God's salvation of grace. Thus the seventh-day Sabbath becomes a weekly reminder of the gospel by which we are saved unto eternal life.

Sabbath after the apostles' deaths

As the apostles aged, the church began to be infiltrated with strange thinking about the Sabbath. Early in the second century, some believers were already discussing John's expression "the Lord's day" (Revelation 1:10) as though it referred to the first day of the week. It does not. In the Bible's final book, "the Lord's day" almost certainly refers to the prophetic "day of the Lord" that is unveiled in its 22 chapters. In the unlikely event that "the Lord's Day" does refer to a day of the week, then the day that Jesus claimed to be Lord of — the Sabbath day of Mark 2:28 — is the only viable candidate. The Scripture never plainly links the first day of the week with either "the Lord's Day" or the "day of the Lord."

By this twisting of Revelation 1:10, some church leaders began

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teaching that it was appropriate to observe Sunday as the “Lord’s Day” instead of, or in addition to, the seventh-day Sabbath. The discussions and arguments over this topic have scarcely let up over the centuries.

Authentic biblical institutions have their origins recorded in Scripture, with these attributes: 1) God commands them; 2) Instructions are given for their observance; 3) Blessings are promised for proper observance; and 4) No ambiguity exists as to their origin or whether their observance is God’s will. These attributes are easily validated with regard to the Sabbath but are nonexistent with regard to Sunday or any other supposed weekly rest day.

God had man’s benefit in mind when He rested, then blessed the day and made it holy from the start. Jesus spoke of its origin, saying to the Jews, “The Sabbath was made for man . . .” (Mark 2:27). When God blessed the seventh day and made it holy at the end of Creation week, that was the only occasion of the Sabbath being “made.” It began distinct from other weekdays by God’s own action of not continuing to create tangible things on that day and by giving it a special blessing, thereby making it “holy.” The Lord spoke of the Sabbath as “My holy day” (Isaiah 58:13), and Jesus said He was Lord of it (Mark 2:28). He created the Sabbath and set guidelines for its observance, thus demonstrating His lordship over it.

In contrast, recurring celebration of the first day of the week (or any other) has no such beginning in God’s Word; it originated elsewhere. The Bible neither discusses the first day of the week becoming holy nor gives any guidelines for its observance. Nowhere does the Bible support observing any day of the week in honor of the Lord’s resurrection.

Observance not just for Jews

The Sabbath was not first anchored in the law. It began as one of the Lord’s creative acts at the end of Creation week. It began with man’s benefit in mind and continues for that purpose. However, the Sabbath was incorporated in His law and given as a command to a mixed multitude of Gentiles and Israelites. Keeping it is well illustrated in the teachings and practice of Jesus Christ and in the gospel of grace preached by the apostles in His name.

When Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27), “for man” included all humanity on earth. At the time the Sabbath was made and hallowed, no nation of Israel yet existed. Nor would the people later called Jews even be known for at least two thousand years after the Sabbath became God’s designated rest day “for man.”

Further, the Ten Commandments, which included the Sabbath, were spoken and commanded both to Israel and to the Gentile population that departed Egypt with them (Exodus 12:37, 38, 49; 20:10; Isaiah 56:6, 7; Acts 13:42-44). Paul categorically upheld the Sabbath for Christians by affirming that the law is established by faith (Romans 3:31). The law Paul spoke of included the Ten Commandments, as seen in Romans 7:7; 13:9. James affirms the importance of observing all the Ten in 2:10, 11, where he reasons that breaking one point of the law breaks the whole law. He illustrates by quoting two of the Ten Commandments.

Since the Decalogue is such a unit, James and Paul thus affirm the validity of Sabbath. Their meeting with both Jews and Gentiles in and out of the synagogues shows their continued respect for the fourth command. The weekly Sabbath still refers only to the seventh day of the week, not to any other. It is still holy and remains a command of God for all His people.

How Sabbath is to be observed is not for us to determine according to our individual preferences, but according to biblical guidelines and examples. Those guidelines refocus our thoughts and words toward God and His Word, rather than on our usual work, our usual thoughts and pleasures. It is a holy time designed for worship, and restful fellowship with God and His children.

May we all learn to fully enjoy and appreciate its blessings!

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Shorthand summary of the issue

First, the Sabbath was blessed as a memorial to God's handiwork at the end of Creation week (Genesis 2:2, 3; Exodus 20:11). As long as heaven and earth remain, the seventh day will retain this magnificent meaning, and some men, at least, will remember their Creator on it.

Second, the Sabbath was set aside (sanctified) as a day of rest from the labor of the first six days, by God's own example (Genesis 2:2, 3). As long as men imitate their Maker by engaging in fruitful labor, the need for a weekly rest day will remain.

Third, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" was spoken by God and was written by Him on tables of stone — the heart of the old covenant (Exodus 20:8-11). As long as the moral essence of God's law stands, the seventh day will be sacred time.

Fourth, Sabbath was prescribed as a day for holy assembly for the nation of Israel (Leviticus 23:3). Christ our Master followed this practice, and it can carry the same significance for Christians.

Fifth, Sabbath was observed as a sacred custom by Jesus and His apostles (Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14, 42-44; 17:2). As the last great Day of the Lord nears, the need remains for Christ-followers to assemble for worship and mutual encouragement — as He did (Hebrews 10:25).

Sixth, the Sabbath became a picture of the New Testament gospel in Christ. Just as we lay aside our efforts at self-justification when we trust Jesus the Savior (Ephesians 2:8, 9; Titus 3:5), so does every seventh day call us to cease our labors and enter His divine provision for time and eternity. As long as salvation by grace through faith apart from human work remains true, the Sabbath day will be a true teacher of the gospel.

Seventh, the Sabbath provides a preview of eternal rest in God's coming kingdom (Hebrews 4:1-11). Understanding God's plan for a future filled with righteousness, we affirm the corresponding truth that there remains a *sabbatismos* (Sabbath rest) for the people of God (v. 9).

In these summary points above, note the roles and meanings attached to the biblical seventh day: a memorial, a day of rest and assembly, a command and a custom, a picture, and a preview.

Would it not be wise, then, to embrace and celebrate a gift so replete with divine reflection and benefit as Sabbath is?

Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*, except where noted.

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Statement of Faith 9

Marriage

Marriage is an institution of God and is an exclusive lifetime union between one man and one woman for the purpose of perpetuating humanity and enriching human experience.

Reflecting the bond between Christ and His church, marriage may be broken only by sexual immorality. Like the Sabbath, marriage dates to Creation week, is intrinsic to the moral law, is reformed in Christ's teachings, and finds its ultimate meaning at His return.

“It is not good that man should be alone.”

These words of the Lord in Genesis 2:18a have their primary reference to the first man, Adam, whom God had formed from the dust of the ground (v. 7). In a fuller sense, they echo far beyond our first father and apply directly to every man, woman, boy, and girl from that day until now. We were created for relationship and intimacy.

People not only need the Lord who made them but also other humans. That we are social creatures reflects our being made in the image of God. From eternity our Creator existed — not alone but in perfect union as spiritual Father and Son. Because God wanted humans to reflect His own nature, He made us to be loving, relating, communicating beings.

While Adam was still alone, God generously responded to his relational need, saying, “I will make him a helper comparable to him” (v. 18b).

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said:

“This is now bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man.”

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed (vv. 21-25).

These verses are the Bible’s passage of primary reference regarding marriage, laying a sure foundation for all the Word will later say on the topic. The words *marriage* or *wedding* are not used here, but the “man and his wife” phrase conveys that idea — a marriage made and recognized in heaven.

Marriage design principles

1. God designed marriage to meet a broad range of human needs (v. 18). Healthy marriages contribute much toward our requirements for social companionship, economic security, psychological significance, emotional acceptance, and support. Marriages provide a best-and-blest outlet for human sexual needs. In these areas and more, human experience echoes God's Word that it is not good for man to be alone (see also Ecclesiastes 4:9).

“He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD” (Proverbs 18:22) and “Marriage is honorable in all . . .” (Hebrews 13:4a). Though not married Himself, Jesus honored matrimony by attending a wedding in Cana of Galilee and providing its best refreshment (John 2:1-11).

As social creatures, we need each other — to love and be loved, know and be known, to speak and to listen, give and receive. This is the simplest and most compelling explanation for friendships in general and for marriages in particular.

2. God designed marriage to be mutual and complementary, not partisan or self-serving. Symbolically, God took a rib from Adam's side — not a spur from his heel or a chip from his head — to form his wife, Eve. While males and females play distinct roles in God's family plan (Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7), this difference does not extend to our essential value as humans in God's image. Any view of marital submission that raises the dignity and value of one spouse above the other is to that degree deficient.

3. God designed marriage to be heterosexual, not homosexual. When God created a helper comparable to Adam, He made a woman, not another man (2:22). All marriages recorded in Scripture were heterosexual. Marriage between a man and a woman reflects the biblical picture of union between the God-man Christ Jesus and His bride,

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the church. Homosexuality is seen as immoral behavior throughout the Bible (Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:24ff; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10).

4. God designed marriage to be exclusive and monogamous, not open or polygamous. The original blueprint, “leave . . . be joined . . .” (Genesis 2:24), suggests the sanctity of marriage above all other human relationships, even parental ties. Nothing should be allowed to intrude upon the marriage bond, heaven’s design even before sin tarnished the relationship.

It is true that a few of God’s men (Jacob, David, and Solomon, for example) took more than one wife. They were, in fact, polygamists. The experience of these three with simultaneous wives, however, does not recommend the practice for imitation. In the case of kings who took multiple wives, God had forbidden it in His law (Deuteronomy 17:17). And in Jacob’s situation, multiple wives brought him a great deal of family conflict and pain (Genesis 27ff). Further, the New Testament never approves polygamy but consistently recommends that each man have his own wife instead (Matthew 19:4, 5; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6).

5. God designed marriage to be permanent, not temporary. The phrase “be joined” of the primary passage (Genesis 2:24), otherwise translated “cling” or “be united,” speaks to this truth. This principle is recalled by the words of Jesus Christ, who answered those who asked about the permissibility of divorce on demand, saying, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. What God hath joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:8, 6b).

The Bible’s standard of marriage permanence is echoed in many other texts, including Matthew 5:32; 19:6, 9; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:27; and Romans 7:2a: “For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to *her* husband as long as he lives.”

6. God designed marriage to be the relationship in which children are conceived, born, and nurtured to adulthood. This is implied in Genesis 2:24b, 25: “they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” While human sexuality serves other purposes than reproduction (as the Proverbs and Song of Solomon nicely affirm), still God’s good gift of sex is tied by nature to human procreation and, by His written Word, to the busi-

ness of marriage (Genesis 1:27, 28; 2:25). This link between marriage and family is seen in Malachi 2:14, 15 and 1 Corinthians 7:13, 14, both of which relate the blessing of children to the union of their parents as husband and wife. It has been well said: “Marriage is an institution that no family should be without.”

Based on the passage of primary reference (Genesis 2:18-25) and the teachings of Jesus and His apostles, we repeat that marriage is an institution of God intended as an exclusive lifetime union between one man and one woman for the purposes of perpetuating humankind and enriching human experience.

Breakdown of marriages

Humanity has seldom reached the level of obedience we were designed for, nor the blessedness such holiness was intended to yield. Squabbles and agonies are common fare in every age, society, and institution — including marriage and the family.

Designed to be a public exhibit of pleasant and productive stability, the domestic scene too often attracts attention by its discord instead. In some nations since 1960, the percentage of marriages whose rapture has been ruptured by divorce approaches fifty.

All such failures are biblically tied to the first sin and the resulting curse that sin brought into human experience. As wedlock is introduced late in the second chapter of Genesis, so sin breaks out in the third — and the matrimonial bliss intended for the first couple is sorely tested.

And not just for Adam and Eve. God’s words to the erring pair indicate that, resulting from their sin, constant strain and labor would accompany all efforts to live in perfect harmony. To the woman He said, “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over

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you” (3:16b). If the salvation work of Christ ends this curse, it does not erase the fact that many marriage relationships continue to endure the negative reality expressed therein.

Difficulty in all marriages and failure in some are inevitable. Though still the best option for permanent, fulfilling relationships between the sexes, matrimony is fraught with some degree of frustration for both partners. In even the best matches, partners often learn that a healthy marriage must be the union of two good forgivers.

For Abraham and Sarah, the source of discord was infertility. For Isaac and Rebekah, it was favoritism toward offspring. Multiple wives were sources of conflict for Jacob, David, and Solomon. For others, it may be financial issues, role expectations, sexual tensions, the in-laws, or other matters.

Discord often boils down to personal selfishness and failure to treat our spouse as we’d wish to be treated. We could adjust our attitudes and actions, but too often we don’t. Disaffection sets in, leading to a parting of the ways. If serious emotional or physical abuse is avoided as the gap widens, the divorcing couple are more successful than many. The failure is the same, however, as the marriage ends.

Both Paul and Peter write remarkable paragraphs on the duty of Christian husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and the corresponding responsibility of believing wives to respect their husbands and submit to his loving leadership (Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7).

Teachings on divorce

1. All marital separation and divorce is due to human failure and is never God’s perfect will. Implicit in the passage of primary reference (Genesis 2:18-25), this becomes clear in later texts (Malachi 2:14, 15; Matthew 5:31, 32; 19:3-12; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:2, 3; 1 Corinthians 7:10, 27).

2. Though all marital failure implies sin’s presence, some separation and divorce reflect God’s will more closely than others. This is seen in the exception clause, a teaching of Christ found only in the first Gospel. In two places Matthew records that Jesus couches His instruction

about divorce by adding the words “except sexual immorality”: “But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery” (5:32; see also 19:9).

“Sexual immorality” in these verses comes from the Greek word *porneia*. Often translated as “fornication,” it covers a wide range of sexual offenses. In these verses Jesus says that a marriage broken by the sexual unfaithfulness of one spouse may result in a divorce that He recognizes as legitimate for the other. Sexual immorality, then, is a true marriage-breaker according to Christ, and the one exception to His rule of lifelong matrimony.

In addressing the issue of divorce (Matthew 19:3-9), Jesus would have been fully aware of the hot debate in the Jewish culture of His day. Leading rabbis, Hillel and Shammai, had taken opposite positions on the subject. Hillel taught that divorce was permitted for almost any cause, evidently following the way Moses’ teaching had often been misunderstood (vv. 3, 7, 8; see Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Shammai, on the other hand, taught the more restrictive view, that Moses intended divorce only for sexual uncleanness, as the Deuteronomy text implies. Jesus’ position is very close to what Shammai taught, i.e., valid divorce is restricted to one cause (*porneia*) and must not be broadened to cover others.

This issue has generated much debate. Some have concluded that the exception clause, found only in Matthew, is essentially meaningless and that Jesus has no tolerance for divorce in any case. Others go to an opposite extreme by forcing nearly every divorce through the one exception Jesus gave — that of sexual immorality — thus stretching that “loophole” beyond recognition.

It is rare for anyone in divorce proceedings to concede that his/her case does not fit Christ’s exception. Still, it discounts Jesus’ words and undermines Scripture’s credibility to insist that, contrary to Matthew

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5:32 and 19:9, divorce is never permissible for Christians, regardless of the situation.

3. No marital separation or divorce separates its victims from God's love. This statement takes its lead from the infinite capacity of Christ to forgive sin, as expressed in Matthew 12:31. Such sin is atoned for by His death and resurrection on behalf of fallen humanity. Every divorce involves sin at some point, some more than others. But no divorce is unforgivable. The teachings of Jesus and the New Testament on the topic of unpardonable sin never link it to marriage, divorce, or remarriage.

Christians who experience divorce and remarriage may confidently seek the forgiving heart of Jesus in this matter, for He says that "all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter" (Mark 3:28). In prayers of confession and repentance over divorce and remarriage, Christians should honestly confront their own words, actions, and attitudes that contributed to the divorce, no matter how great the faults and failures of their former spouse.

Sample categories of divorce

Not all divorces are equal. Here are some cases that may be encountered:

1. Divorce chosen or experienced prior to Christian conversion: By the terms of the gospel and the new life it brings, coming to Christ is a definitive turning point. The new birth marks a new start; the guilt and shame of the old are gone. Divorce and remarriage prior to conversion should not be detrimental to membership nor to one's good standing in God's church. New Christians often face enough personal challenges imposed by their own indelible memories and fading life patterns. They should not be saddled with additional penalties needlessly placed upon them by those in spiritual authority.

2. Divorce experienced by Christians faithful to their marriage vows, while their spouses were unfaithful: By the terms of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, these believers may accept or seek a divorce, in which case the marriage is dissolved. The offending spouse is one who persists in sexual unfaithfulness, i.e., in *porneia*. The faith-

ful spouse in such cases is considered the “innocent party” and may continue his/her service in the church, including leadership.

However, no Scripture requires believers to divorce a spouse after a single offense, or many offenses, of adultery. Christians are to seek for marital reconciliation and restoration whenever possible. The prophet Hosea is a classic example of one who stayed faithful to an oft-straying spouse, transforming that situation to God’s glory.

3. Divorce chosen by a Christian who was not faithful to his/her spouse: A believer who violates his/her marriage vows by sexual immorality should expect to be held accountable and to forego church leadership positions during an extended time of personal restoration. Good standing in the church may be forfeited by persistence in willful sin or by disregard for spiritual authority.

4. Divorce chosen by a Christian who is abandoned by an unbelieving spouse: Based on 1 Corinthians 7, desertion may be a special case of Jesus’ exception clause. In verses 10-17 of this chapter, Paul addresses the Christian whose husband or wife will not follow Jesus. Should they remain together, or should they separate?

His counsel is that the believing spouse in a mixed marriage must do his/her best to maintain the marriage (vv. 12, 13), in part because spiritual benefits accrue to the unsaved spouse and the children (vv. 14, 16). However, Paul concedes that if the unbelieving spouse determines to leave, the Christ-follower should accept that reality and is no longer under bondage to that marriage (v. 15).

5. Legal separation or divorce chosen by a Christian married to one who inflicts abuse upon the spouse and/or children: This difficult case does not appear to be addressed by Jesus’ exception clause or elsewhere in Scripture. We believe, however, that one who suffers physical or extreme mental abuse from a spouse, to herself or to the children, should remove (with the children) from the abuse and consider bring-

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ing the offending party before the church (see Matthew 18:15-17) or legal authorities.

What about remarriage?

We have seen that, while marriage was designed to last until death, it is often cut short by divorce, due to human frailty and sin. Sadly, low standards in today's culture ensure that many believers find Jesus' exception clause applicable to them, and others invoke that clause to seek the divorce they hope He will bless. The "matrimonial loophole" that Jesus no doubt intended to be small and restraining has become a large and ragged wound to the institution of marriage!

What about Christians who were once wed to an unfaithful spouse and are now divorced as provided in Jesus' exception clause? Are they free to remarry without fear of displeasing their Lord?

The Bible strongly suggests in several ways that they are. Consider:

- The Old Testament word for *divorcement* means a cutting of the matrimonial bond (*Strong's Concordance*, Hebrew Word #3748).
- The New Testament word for *divorced* means "to release, to set free" (*Strong's*, Greek Word #630).
- The divorce permitted under Moses (Deuteronomy 24:1-4) carried with it the right of remarriage.
- It makes little sense to insist that Jesus would give a faithful spouse the right to divorce an immoral partner, and then penalize him/her by disallowing remarriage.
- The phrase "husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2) forbids polygamy, but not the proper succession of spouses following death or legitimate divorce. (This view predominates among conservative scholars.)
- When an unbeliever departs, Paul's words "not under bondage" suggest dissolution of the marriage (1 Corinthians 7:15; see also the word *loosed* in v. 27).

These points substantiate the common understanding, both in ancient and modern times, of what happens when a divorce is granted: The marriage is dissolved. A divorced person is not still married. One who has been divorced for an authentic Bible reason has a valid right to remarry. While a marriage ending in divorce is dissolved for both

parties, only the guilty (i.e., sexually immoral) partner faces the prospect of blame before God for the failure of the marriage.

Divine analogies, summary

Our understanding about the beauty, holiness, and permanence of marriage is not complete until we probe a truth that, though not fully understood, goes near to the heart of God's purpose in giving marriage to the human family. It is this: God designed marriage to reflect the eternal reality that will exist between Christ and the church.

We have hinted at this before, pointing out that the human gifts of love and communication are patterned after the divine relation between Father and Son. Beyond this, we may assert that the exquisite intimacies experienced, often too faintly, between a human husband and his wife are mere foretastes of the perfect intimacy that will exist when Jesus comes to take His bride unto Himself for eternity.

This divine analogy of marriage parallels that of the Sabbath, its twin topic in the second chapter of Genesis. Both Sabbath and marriage began in Creation week as God's gifts to man: marriage on day six, Sabbath on day seven.

Both the Sabbath and marriage entered human experience before the fall of man and the arrival of sin. Thus they are institutions not just for a sinful realm, but also for a perfect one.

Both the Sabbath and marriage reside as positive precepts in the heart of the Bible's first great summary of moral law, the Ten Commandments. As fourth and fifth commands, they hinge the two tables of the Decalogue — summarizing duty to God and launching duty to man.

Both the Sabbath and marriage were reformed and magnified, not discounted or discontinued, by the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels.

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Both the Sabbath and marriage will find their ultimate meaning and fulfillment at Christ's return. Until then, we should remember, respect, and celebrate both the Sabbath and marriage to the honor and glory of God who gave them.

As Christians committed to the written Word, the Bible, and the living Word, Jesus Christ, we embrace God's good gift of marriage. In particular, we embrace that pattern of marriage first outlined by the Father in Genesis and further developed in the words of the Son and His apostles. We believe that a faithful, mutually enriching marriage and family relationship can be our best foretaste of Heaven's coming kingdom.

As fellow strugglers in a world under the bondage of corruption and in a church not yet fully free from it, we confess limited success in finding God's best for our homes and families. Some of our marriages fail, for legitimate and illegitimate reasons. We lament our sinful disregard for our former and present spouses, and for God's holy standard in marriage. We seek His mercy and grace upon a church and culture that too easily excuse our failures when the Lord's "excuse" does not cover us. Our marriage sins, inside and outside the church, have contributed much toward the declining social decency and moral integrity in our world.

We embrace our Christian brethren whose sins and failures are most obvious in this regard, extending the same love, acceptance, and forgiveness we ourselves have received from Jesus in matters equally sinful, if less well-known. We reject the double standard that places public shame and reproach on those who've failed in marriage, while exonerating those whose sins are supposedly more respectable.

As God's people, we turn again to the enduring teachings of the Bible with regard to all human relationships and to marriage in particular. Let us follow them through the power that comes from God's Spirit. And let us look continually to Jesus who has died, risen again, and entered heaven for us, ever to intercede for our eternal salvation in Him.

Scripture quotations are from the *New King James Version*.

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Statement of Faith 10

Christian Living

Christians are called to holiness in thought, word, and deed and to express faith in Christ through devotion to God and godly interaction with others. As a result — not a cause — of redemption, believers should 1) develop relationship with God through Bible reading and study, prayer, fasting, worship, and obedience; 2) relieve the physical and spiritual needs of humanity by compassionate social action and gospel witness; 3) oppose pride, envy, indolence, lust, covetousness, and other evils in the spirit; 4) refuse immoral amusements and practices such as pornography, sexual immorality, and homosexuality in the flesh.

The words of Ephesians 2:8-10 form a wonderful bridge between the truth that salvation is by grace through faith to the reality that believers in Christ are created for obedience to God. Paul writes, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Freely redeemed by grace, Christians are called to lives of holiness and good works, forsaking the sin and bondage that was our previous manner of life (Romans 13:13, 14; Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:17-24).

Demonstrated in various ways, holiness is summed up in the commands of love to God and others (Matthew 22:34-40). True love for God is demonstrated by obedience to His Word, submission to His will, and adoration of His person (Deuteronomy 11:1; John 14:15; James 4:7; 1 John 5:2, 3). True love for our fellowman is demonstrated by caring concern, unselfish relationships, and refusal to harm others (Romans 13:10; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8).

Developing relationship

In the interest of this love, the following admonitions flow: Develop a relationship with God through Bible reading and study, prayer, fasting, worship, and obedience.

It is clear that we come to know God in a unique, life-changing way through the reading and study of His Word (John 5:39; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; Hebrews 1:1, 2; 2 Peter 1:19-21).

To communicate with our heavenly Father, receive the Spirit’s guidance, understand and apply the Bible’s words, we must pray as we read and study Scripture. Prayer is communication with God — speaking to Him and hearing from Him in heart and mind. Prayer takes us before God’s throne and into His spiritual presence (Hebrews 4:16).

Salvation could not be accomplished without prayer (Romans 10:13). Confession of sin, repentance, and receiving Christ are all acts

of seeking God at His throne of grace. Prayer for laborers in the harvest is critical to spreading the gospel (Luke 10:2).

Jesus taught us to pray (Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 11:1-4). He gave us His prayer example, commanded us to pray, retreated often for prayer, prayed for His disciples and for all future believers, prayed in the garden, and prayed on the cross. Jesus committed both His Father and Himself to answer our prayers (Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:23, 24; John 14:13, 14; 15:7, 16; 16:23, 24).

The Bible says prayer must be made in faith and according to God's will (Mark 11:23, 24; James 1:5, 6; 1 John 5:14). Disobedience to God is often an obstacle to answered prayer (Isaiah 59:1, 2; Psalm 66:18). Forgiveness and right relation with others is vital to effective prayer (Matthew 5:23, 24; 6:12, 14, 15; Mark 11:25, 26). Often, we wait on the Lord for His answers (Isaiah 40:31).

We are to pray in everything (Philippians 4:6), for all things (Matthew 21:22), everywhere (1 Timothy 2:8), at all times (Luke 18:1), in every situation and without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Jesus quoted the prophet who said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:7; Matthew 21:13).

For every problem and struggle in life, prayer is our resort. When we are sick, we may call for the church elders to anoint with oil and pray (James 5:14, 15).

Fasting is often mentioned in Scripture, with prayer, in situations of great importance or difficulty. Believers may fast to draw closer to God, to examine themselves, or to focus on their prayer concerns (Matthew 6:16-18; Isaiah 58).

Worship is the natural overflow of the heart that honors God for who He is and what He has done. Worship proclaims God's worthiness and allows believers to join the heavenly host in His adoration and praise (Revelation 4—5). Often expressed by the spoken word

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and by vocal or instrumental music (Psalms 149—150), worship at its core has to do with sacrifice and service. Authentic worship offers one's entire life to God (Romans 12:1, 2), not merely an hour of public song, prayer, and preaching.

Obedience to God is a demonstration of faith and love. By faith, we obey because we trust that God's commands are right, true, just, and loving. By love, we obey because we desire to live in fellowship with and submission to the One who redeemed us from sin and death.

Each of these elements serve to draw us into a deeper knowledge of God and His Son Jesus Christ. As we come to know Him more, we love and desire Him even more. This motivates us to return to these disciplines again and again, as we reap the benefits of a life-changing knowledge of our God.

Relieving physical and spiritual needs

Jesus Christ's main purpose for coming to earth was to bring complete redemption to humanity, releasing us from the guilt and grip of our sins as well as from all kinds of bondage and oppression (see Luke 4:18, 19; John 3:16, 17; and 1 John 3:8).

Called to walk in Jesus' steps, we recognize our responsibility to actively pursue His purpose also, thus advancing God's kingdom in the world. As God's rule and reign come to bear upon the earth, the works of the Devil are destroyed; humanity is liberated from the awful effects of sin; and those who stand condemned are offered forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life.

After the manner of Christ and the early church, we seek to carry out this mission through compassionate service to those most profoundly affected by sin (e.g., orphans, widows, the poor and oppressed, the sick, the imprisoned, and victims of war, crime, violence, etc.) and through the presentation of the salvation message to all.

Opposing evils in the spirit

In our desire to demonstrate love to our neighbors as ourselves, we reject those inward dispositions that injure others and destroy self, including pride, envy, indolence, lust, and covetousness.

Pride exalts the self above its rightful place. It deceives the one who elevates himself and victimizes those diminished by it. Pride distances us from God, who gives His grace to the humble (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). Love does not behave this way (1 Corinthians 13:4).

Envy and covetousness seek what belongs to another, often at the expense of the person who has it. Not content with current blessings, the envious and covetous demand their satisfaction in circumstances and material possessions, rather than in relationship with Christ. This is not how love behaves (1 Corinthians 13:4, 5).

Indolence (i.e., sloth, laziness, idleness) hopes for unearned reward, rather than working energetically to glorify God and lovingly bless others.

Lust refers to an appetite out of control or to a desire for something one cannot righteously possess. Lust for food leads to gluttony; lust for sex, to various immoralities; and lust for money, to all manner of evil. The way of love is to be Spirit-led and self-controlled, not defeated by any ungodly appetite.

These are but a sample of the inner evils Christ's disciples will overcome. Scripture shares lists of the works of the flesh and the means to overcome them through confession, repentance, the power of the Spirit within, interpersonal accountability, etc. (Galatians 5:16—6:5; Ephesians 5:3-21; Colossians 3:5-11). We do well to heed these words of Scripture as we yield to the Spirit's work of sanctifying our hearts, out of which spring all manner of evil (Matthew 15:16-20).

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Refusing immoral amusements

The dispositions of the heart discussed above lead to the actions of the flesh listed here. *Sexual immorality*, or *fornication*, is a wide-ranging term that includes any manner of deviation from God's will in these matters. God created sexual intercourse good, pure, and beautiful, commending it to Adam and Eve as a means of marital intimacy and procreation (Genesis 1:28-31; 2:23-25). His intent is that, within the confines of marriage, man and woman would partake of the incredible pleasure and mutual fulfillment that sexual intimacy brings (Proverbs 5:15-19; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5).

Engaging in sexual activity outside marriage, however, is sinful (Hebrews 13:4). Further, some practices within marriage (e.g., mutual viewing of pornography, forced compliance of any sexual act by one spouse upon the other, sodomy, etc.) are deviant and immoral. Undisciplined and uncaring sexual practices between marriage partners carry terrible consequences for those families and cultures that allow them to go unchecked.

Scripture mentions many forms of sexual immorality, all of which corrupt the God-given beauty of intimacy within marriage and threaten the well-being of those who engage in them. Among those forms are sexual intimacy prior to marriage, adultery, prostitution, orgies, group sex, bestiality, voyeurism, sodomy, rape, pedophilia, and incest. Two particularly prevalent and socially acceptable forms, pornography and homosexuality, deserve special attention.

The production of pornography (i.e., words or images that either depict sexual immorality or tend to provoke it) is a fruit of the lust or greed of those who create it. The consumption of pornography is a fruit of the lust of those who choose to read or view it. Those who create or consume pornography are guilty of sexual immorality.

Pornography in our day has far exceeded the bounds of common decency by extending to pedophilia, rape, bestiality, etc. The prevalence and easy availability of porn is shocking and calls us to resolutely safeguard our families and ourselves against this alluring and pernicious onslaught. Those caught in the trap of addiction to pornography need the loving assistance of the body of Christ to overcome and be free of this bondage.

Homosexuality is sexual interaction between two men or two women. Expressly forbidden in God's law (Leviticus 20:13), it is condemned as a sinful work of the flesh in the New Testament (Romans 1:26-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; 1 Timothy 1:9-11). The good news is that, contrary to modern rhetoric, homosexuals can repent of their sin and find cleansing and freedom in Jesus Christ. Understanding this, Christians should treat homosexuals with the love and mercy that Christ extended to the harlots of His day, in hopes that they will be freed from this bondage.

Conclusion

We who have died to sin through salvation in Jesus Christ are called to no longer live in it (Romans 6:2). Rather, we are called to a life of holiness, righteousness, and purity by the grace of God and the power of His Spirit. Our sanctification is the will of God (1 Thessalonians 4:3), who has predestined those who walk in the Spirit to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:1-30). Let us submit to God's purifying work. Let us worship and live in the beauty of holiness as those who have been created for good works!

Scripture quotations are from the *New King James Version*.

Notes

Financial Support for the Gospel

*As a result — not a cause — of redemption,
believers should give tithe and freewill
offerings for the support of the church and its
gospel ministry.*

This study examines the financial support of gospel work in the early Christian church and how it relates today. It reviews the history of tithing and cites instruction for supporting the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. When properly understood, these principles make financial support of the gospel a blessing and privilege, rather than a burden or mere obligation.

Christian stewardship begins with the following truths:

- The earth and all it contains belong to God: “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Psalm 24:1; 50:10, 11; Haggai 2:8). All our abilities, opportunities, and possessions come from Him (Deuteronomy 8:18).
- Humanity is not an owner but a steward. What we possess belongs to God. He has entrusted all things into the dominion and care of the human race for our sustenance, well-being, and comfort (Genesis 1:28).
- God gave humanity life and His only begotten Son for the world’s sins (John 3:16). In love He forgives us, removes our guilt, reconciles us to Himself, and offers us new life. Thus viewed through the gospel, stewardship is a way of giving that originates with God, not with us!
- Stewardship is not motivated by self-interest or even by the demands of biblical law but by our gratitude for a loving, merciful God. We love and give back to God because He first loved and gave to us (1 John 4:19).

Christians should freely and cheerfully support the church and its ministries from what God has generously given them. More than just tithe and offerings, stewardship encompasses the complete commitment of our life, time, abilities, and possessions to God's service (Romans 12:1).

What is the tithe?

The *tithe* refers to one-tenth of a person's increase. Biblically, all increase — grain, fruit, herds and flocks — was subject to the tithe (Leviticus 27:30, 32; Deuteronomy 14:22).

Though the Old Testament tithing laws for Israel are no longer in force, the church and its gospel ministries are still supported by a voluntary tithe and the offerings of its members and friends. Instead of giving tithe as a legal obligation, believers now give tithe and offerings in recognition of God's ownership of all things and in gratitude for His marvelous love and bountiful blessings.

Since the world's economy is now based on a monetary system rather than on agricultural produce, a tithe should be considered as a tenth of one's total earnings (not including business expense).

History of tithing

Tithing is the oldest known system of giving for religious purposes. Its first mention in the Bible is when Abraham was met by Melchizedek upon returning from battle with the Canaanite kings. Melchizedek was "king of Salem" and "priest of God." Upon receiving the blessing of Melchizedek, Abraham "gave him a tenth [tithe] of everything" (Genesis 14:18-20).

The next instance of tithing occurs after Jacob dreamed of the

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stairway to heaven. God promised to give the land to Jacob and his descendants. Jacob then vowed to give back a tenth of all the Lord would give him (Genesis 28:10-22).

With Abraham and Jacob, tithing was a voluntary act of devotion to God in gratitude for His deliverance and promise. It was not mandated by any known law.

As Israel became a nation, tithing became a legal obligation: “Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God” (Exodus 23:19). The tithe — whether produce of the field, fruit of a tree, or animals — was declared to “belong to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD” (Leviticus 27:30, 32).

The tithe was a part of Israel’s stewardship responsibility. They were instructed to take the tithe to the house of God (tabernacle or temple) as a means of accomplishing God’s work and purpose on earth. The tithe became the inheritance of the Levites, who performed religious service unto God on behalf of Israel (Numbers 18:23, 24).

This systematic and proportionate giving was part of the law Israel observed. When Israel tithed, they prospered spiritually and materially. When Israel neglected to tithe, they showed their spiritual indifference toward God and brought difficulty upon themselves. When the people withheld their tithe, Malachi the prophet charged Israel with robbing God (Malachi 3:7, 8). This is a sad note near the end of Old Testament writings.

Tithing in the New Testament

Three New Testament passages refer to tithe.

1. In Matthew 23:23 Jesus commented on the practice of the Pharisees, who tithed on the smallest of their produce (see the parallel text in Luke 11:42). While Jesus criticized the Pharisees for neglecting more important things, He did not criticize but rather commended them for tithing.

2. In Luke 18:12 Jesus told about a Pharisee, praying in the temple, who boasted about his tithing practice.

3. In Hebrews 7:4-9 the writer recalls Abraham’s tithing back in Genesis 14. The inference here is that as faithful Abraham gave a tithe

to Melchizedek in that ancient time, so faithful Christians now give a tithe to spread the gospel of Christ, for Jesus is a high priest forever after the same order of Melchizedek.

None of these references indicates either that tithing continues as a law under the new covenant or that tithing as the voluntary practice of Christians should be discontinued.

Jesus and stewardship

Jesus said much about Christian stewardship and material possessions.

- He did not condemn material possessions. Without hesitation, Jesus attended a great banquet held in His honor — an obvious display of Levi's wealth (Luke 5:29). However, He did warn against greed in the parable of the rich fool (12:13-21).
- Jesus said our primary concern should be the kingdom of God. He assured His followers that God would provide for life's needs (Matthew 6:31-33). He taught that greatness is not measured by wealth but by service to others (Mark 10:43, 44).
- He explained that total Christian stewardship is the complete surrender of ourselves to God. Material possessions are inadequate to express our gratitude and spiritual devotion. Once we dedicate our hearts and minds to God, we give spontaneously (Matthew 10:39; Luke 14:33).
- He recognized those who gave generously and praised those who gave of what little they had (Luke 19:8, 9; 21:1-4).

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Teachings of Apostle Paul

Concerning financial support of the New Testament gospel, Paul gave the most direct and detailed instruction:

Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? (1 Corinthians 9:7-11).

This text makes support of gospel ministers a responsibility of every Christian.

Here, Paul presents three human vocations — warfare, farming, and shepherding — as arguments for gospel support. Quoting from the law that forbids muzzling oxen while they tread out the grain (Deuteronomy 25:4), he insists that neither should those who labor for the gospel be prevented from receiving livelihood by the support of those they serve. This logic transcends the limits of law and makes stewardship a matter of principle.

By referring specifically to those who served under the old covenant, Paul commended tithe and offerings as a means of support for the gospel ministry of the New Testament church. He declared that Christian ministers should be supported "in the same way" as the Levites and priests.

Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:13, 14).

These are Paul's instructions to the Christian church regarding its stewardship responsibility in support of gospel ministry. Paul did not appeal to the law of tithing, but to a timeless and universal principle:

the simple but fair rule that a worker, regardless of whether he sows the seed or harvests the crop, is entitled to his wages. The same teaching is found in 1 Timothy 5:17, 18.

Support of the church's ministry is not an option for Christians. It stems from gratitude for God's grace, received through the preaching and teaching of the gospel: the worker deserves His wages (Luke 10:7).

Proportionate giving is needed no less to carry out the Great Commission under the new covenant than it was to maintain the Levitical system under the old. Devoted people of God will practice God-ordained stewardship principles as a part of their worship and support of gospel ministry.

The blessedness of giving

In addition to appealing for financial support for gospel workers, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to give offerings for the poor saints in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-3; Romans 15:25, 26). The thought that stands out in Paul's later reflection on this (2 Corinthians 8:1-5) is the liberality (generosity) of the Macedonian churches: "They gave . . . even beyond their ability" (v. 2). They gave sacrificially. They were so generous because they had first given themselves to God (v. 5).

Paul later enumerated benefits that would come to the Corinthians through their generous giving: abundant blessings, God's love and grace, and a grateful heart (9:6-8, 11-13).

Paul's instruction regarding stewardship and the Macedonian churches' example of providing for the poor saints in Jerusalem give ample biblical basis for the present-day church's appeal for financial support for its gospel work and for the needs of others. We too should give freely and generously out of a cheerful, grateful heart.

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Conclusion

Throughout the Bible, God's people honored Him with gifts from their material possessions. From early times, they gave voluntary tithe and offerings, recognizing God as creator, owner, and benevolent giver of Himself to humanity.

Just as tithe and offerings supported the religious service carried out in ancient Israel, and just as Paul was to receive his living from believers he served (1 Corinthians 9:14), so we are to give our tithe and offerings from gratitude for the love and grace God has so freely given us, not from compulsion of the law.

Our complete stewardship responsibility can be fulfilled only when we yield our time, talent, and treasure to God. Tithing our income to support God's work is integral to Christian stewardship. It provides a regular, dependable source of income for spreading the gospel.

The Church's motivation in addressing financial stewardship may be summed up in Paul's expression to the Philippian church: "Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account" (Philippians 4:17).

Let's be faithful stewards of all God has given so that our accounts may be credited with God's richest blessing!

Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

Clean Meats for Food

As a result — not a cause — of redemption, believers should eat for food only those meats the Bible describes as “clean.”

God’s desire for His covenant people to be holy — set apart from the world’s wickedness — is a consistent theme of Scripture. A prime example of this theme comes from the pen of the apostle Paul in Romans 12:1, 2. The growth to holiness urged in this text takes place by God’s grace and the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word in the heart of the follower of Christ.

This sanctification process is facilitated by the believer growing in understanding of God’s distinction between what is holy and unholy, clean and unclean. Christians seeking holiness will search for the clean paths of righteousness and shun any wickedness or uncleanness. Paul expresses this powerfully in his 2 Corinthians 6:11-18 discussion of idols, “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you” (v. 17, quoted from Isaiah 52:11).

One opportunity for practicing this holiness is the area of what we eat and don’t eat. Several scriptural principles may guide our dietary choices. Christians do well to study and apply these to guard against unbiblical and unhealthy eating practices. Here we will focus on one particular biblical distinction regarding food.

Notes

Old Testament

As early as the time of the Flood, Scripture distinguishes between clean and unclean animals. Noah was instructed to take *seven* of every clean animal and *two* of every unclean animal with him into the ark (Genesis 7:2, 8). This suggests that a surplus of clean animals would be available for sacrifice after the Flood, leaving others to propagate the species. After departing the ark, “Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar” (8:20).

Later God told Noah, “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs” (9:3). Our first impression here may be that God gave Noah all animals for food. This verse’s final phrase, however, states an important qualifier. Earlier, God had given man “every herb that yields seed . . . and every tree whose fruit yields seed . . . for food” (1:29). That is, He allowed man to eat plants, *with limits*.

Thus God gave Noah all animals “even as the green herbs.” We understand this to mean that there could be certain limitations to the animals given as food, just as plants had been given with limitations.

This inference might be unwarranted were it not for the testimony of God’s law to support the notion that the distinction between clean and unclean animals served not only for purposes of sacrifice but also for human diet. After naming which animals were clean and which were unclean in Leviticus 11, God states in verses 45-47, “I am the LORD . . . be holy, for I am holy. This is the law of the animals and the birds and every living creature . . . to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten.”

The distinction between clean and unclean appears often in the Old Testament, both in reference to food and to holiness in general (e.g., Leviticus 10:10; Deuteronomy 14:3-21; Isaiah 66:17; Ezekiel 22:26; 44:23).

New Testament

Like the Old Testament, the New also contains several texts that encourage God's people to avoid what is unclean and pursue what is clean in all areas of life (e.g. Romans 12:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 6:11-18; Titus 2:11-15; 1 Peter 1:15; 16, et al). While there is no explicit repetition of the command regarding clean and unclean *animals*, several New Testament passages imply the continuity of this instruction. Curiously, some of these are often used to teach that the clean and unclean meats distinction has been abrogated! Let's consider two.

The linchpin text of the argument against the perpetuity of clean and unclean foods for Christians is Acts 10. Here Peter sees a vision of various animals, both clean and unclean, and is commanded to rise, kill, and eat. He is unwilling to do so because he has never eaten anything common or unclean. This response indicates either that Christ's teaching did not overturn the clean/unclean laws or that, if it did, Peter certainly misunderstood his Lord's teaching regarding what was fit to eat.

In the vision, Peter is told that he must not call common what God has cleansed. The vision repeats three times and leaves Peter wondering about its meaning (Acts 10:9-17).

Later, in Cornelius' house, Peter understands the meaning of the vision: "God has shown me that I should not call *any man* common or unclean" (v. 28, emphasis added). Nowhere does Scripture say that God intended, or that Peter understood, this vision to mean that God had made all *animals* clean. Rather, the biblical explanation of the vision is that God wanted Peter to stop seeing *Gentile people* as unclean. It is irresponsible interpretation to insert other meanings into scriptural visions than those specifically given.

Thus the main passage used to support eating unclean animals, when understood as Peter himself came to understand it, does not

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support that practice at all. Rather it implicitly strengthens the argument for Christians distinguishing between clean and unclean meats. Peter, an apostle of the faith, testified after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ that he still respected that distinction in his diet. It seems God would have used this occasion for correction of Peter's thinking and practice, yet none was given.

Our next passage, 1 Timothy 4:3-5, lists a few things forbidden by those who depart from the faith, including "foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving. . . ." Often used to support Christians eating any animal they please, this text actually teaches that we ought to receive and eat with thanks any food that is sanctified through the word of God and prayer (v. 5). Thus this passage defends the consumption only of what *God created to be eaten*, and God never declared that unclean animals are to be received for food.

Other food-related passages often used to support the eating of unclean flesh actually address the issue of human traditions, not clean or unclean meat. Thus the incident in Mark 7:1-23 concerns the tradition of the elders about washing of hands (vv. 3, 4), and Jesus' comments in verses 14-23 must be understood in that context. Furthermore, the purification spoken of in verse 19 is by the digestive process, not the cleansing of unclean meat prior to consumption.

Also, in Romans 14:14 Paul says, "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself." Since the context here contrasts meat-eating with vegetarianism (vv. 1-4), this verse should not be misconstrued essentially as a contrast between clean and unclean animals.

Similarly, Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 8 (all) and 10 (vv. 23-31) do not refer to clean and unclean meat, but to food offered to idols. Indeed, while Paul's comments regarding food are often used to support the consumption of unclean meat, we contend that Scripture never defines unclean meat as *food* and thus passages such as Romans 14:17 and Colossians 2:16, which speak of *food*, should not be misinterpreted to refer to the issue of unclean animals.

In summary, these passages illustrate that the New Testament contains a substantial amount of teaching regarding believers and food. While the New Testament never explicitly repeats the clean and unclean laws, neither does it explicitly repeal them.

Conclusion

Having considered the biblical witness, we confidently call upon believers to distinguish between clean and unclean animals in their diet. God desires His people to be set apart in holiness, to distinguish between good and evil, clean and unclean. May our observance of this biblical counsel be an outward expression of inward desire to be pure and unspotted by the world's evil, and may it remind us continually to separate from the unclean in every area of our lives.

Scripture quotations are from the *New King James Version*.

Notes

Military Warfare

As a result — not a cause — of redemption, believers should regard participation in physical warfare as contrary to a Christian’s humanitarian calling.

The question to be addressed here is whether Holy Scripture approves, or disapproves, the participation of Christ’s followers in military warfare.

In the wider Christian community, most churches and individuals answer the question with a hesitant and qualified “Yes, Jesus’ disciples may take up physical weapons to fight for their country.” Bible students are often hesitant about their “yes,” recognizing that war is inherently evil and never God’s perfect will. They view it as the lesser of two evils.

Serious students may also qualify their “yes” by appealing to a historical viewpoint called the “just war” theory. This teaches that Jesus’ disciples must not serve in any and every war, but may serve in those wars that meet certain established criteria.

Church of God (Seventh Day) is one of a few churches that take a firmer stance against military warfare than the preceding paragraphs describe. Our views are not as fully pacifist, however, as the views of those who suggest that Christians should never resort to physical violence in resisting evil, even in defending their families or in performing the duties of civil police.

Our church’s unwillingness to endorse taking up arms for military service in behalf of country is based on the example and teachings of Jesus Christ, and supported by the writings of His apostles.

In a brief dialogue with the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, Jesus spoke these words: “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom

were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36).

A few hours earlier, Jesus had warned an angry, militant Peter, “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52).

In these two verses, Jesus cuts to the heart of this issue by contrasting the identity and methods of His kingdom with those of earthly kingdoms. In the kingdoms of this world, nations fight against other nations with wars and threats of war. Nations rise and fall by their military strength or lack of it. Soldiers are drafted or hired into the service of defending national borders, or crossing them in the nation’s interests. For the same reason, soldiers kill other soldiers from other countries — while knowing that the enemy could be Christian like them — and are themselves killed. All this is standard practice in the kingdoms of this world.

Christ came armed with a different worldview, a different approach to conflict resolution, and a different kingdom that does not depend upon physical power for its support and defense. Unlike earthly kingdoms that rule over physical lands, His throne exists in human hearts and transcends national borders.

Jesus introduced a kingdom of God in which both territory and warfare are spiritual. In Christ’s kingdom of the heart and life, the soldier dons different armor: a helmet of salvation, a breastplate of righteousness, a loin plate of truth, and boots of gospel peace (Ephesians 6:11-16). The weapons Jesus endorses are a shield of faith and the Spirit’s sword — God’s Word. In Christ’s kingdom, the citizenry so armed wins many unlikely victories by loving enemies and yielding earthly rights in a greater cause.

Christ’s words to Pilate (John 18:36, 37), then, affirm that He has a kingdom and that He is its king. It is spiritual territory, consisting of

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human hearts and lives that recognize and surrender to His lordship. All citizens of Christ's kingdom are called to its service and constitute its standing army (2 Corinthians 10:1-5).

Being citizens of Christ's kingdom does not deny the followers of Jesus their citizenship in earthly kingdoms as well. It does affirm, however, that where duties clash, what's owed to Christ takes priority over what's owed to Caesar. The issue of military warfare is one where our Lord's higher calling trumps the Christian's duty to "Caesar."

Before and after

In military warfare, a vivid contrast exists between the practice of God's people, Israel, and God's people, the church. Under the old covenant, God authorized Moses, Joshua, David, and other leaders to wage physical war against nations that had polluted the land of Canaan with their sins or threatened the nation of Israel with invasion and servitude. Under the new covenant, however, no earthly nation is authorized by God to subdue other nations or seize territory by waging war, nor has Jesus Christ authorized His followers to serve the armies of any earthly nation engaged in war.

We see this contrast in the words of Jesus, who said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:43, 44).

Jesus drew the line not between one nation and another, but between heaven and earth. He taught, for example, to lay up treasures in heaven, not to focus on earthly possessions that could be plundered by thieves or taken by armies. He instructed His followers to flee from Jerusalem when it came under siege, not to participate in its defense. He predicted persecution of believers and said that some would be put to death, but He offered little hint that His followers should defend themselves against that possibility.

On the contrary, Jesus stated that if someone takes your coat, let him have your cloak also (Matthew 5:40). If one compels you to go with him a mile, go with him two (v. 41). In the same context, He

said, “But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also” (v. 39).

Jesus taught that His disciples should pay taxes (“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s . . .” (22:21, NIV), even if Caesar doesn’t always use the revenue honorably. Human governments play a God-approved role in providing for the safety of citizens (Romans 13:1-7). Paul does not say, though, that Christians should join a military system that provides for national security, since to do so would conflict with the teachings and practice of our Lord. By the Holy Spirit, Christ empowers His disciples not to overpower others with our armies, but to win them to the gospel in loving surrender of their hearts to Him.

How are we to understand all of this in the twenty-first century? Shall we assume that Christians may participate in military conflict, like any other citizen? Or shall we search for and embrace the perspective of Jesus Christ for citizens of God’s kingdom?

To be sure, the life and teachings of Christ erect a different standard than common practice on many issues. Instead of following a crowd to do evil, God’s children choose to follow Jesus’ teaching and example. This raises serious questions about a Christian’s participation in common warfare.

Paul said:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Grateful for the blessings of national heritage and common defense, Christians should consider the grace and truth of Jesus as even greater blessings. Those who trust the arm of flesh and military weap-

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only for their defense may be forgetting the greater security found in the God of heaven.

May each follower of Christ be led by God's Word and Spirit to discern the will of the Lord in this matter.

Historical epilogue

The historical position of the Church of God (Seventh Day) has been to recommend that members of the Church avoid participation in military service, often called "carnal warfare." This viewpoint prevailed in the first years of our church's history in Michigan, when a male member in that state was disciplined for accepting the call of his country to serve the Union Army during the American Civil War.

Beyond this incident, few references to a conviction against carnal warfare exist in the early publications of the Church, and information remains sketchy until World Wars I and II in the first half of the twentieth century. Then, attention was drawn to the subject of "conscientious objectors" among the Mennonite and Quaker churches by men who wished to decline the draft into active military service but were willing to serve in humanitarian ways, such as giving medical assistance to war victims.

During this era, a few men of the Church served prison sentences because of their conviction against participation in carnal warfare, rather than responding to draft notices and complying with registration requirements. In a case or two, better information and counsel would likely have allowed the men to escape the suffering of prison, while retaining their commitment not to serve in the military. Many others did perform national service in non-combatant roles during World War II, most of them in medical units.

In the late 1940's, the US Congress passed laws providing for "Alternative Service," meaning that men who were subject to Selective Service Draft could request a classification of 1A-O and be assigned to work in hospitals, health care facilities, or other community service organizations. This permitted them to serve for a time equivalent to that required by the prevailing mandatory draft.

After the Viet Nam War, the US Selective Service Draft was dis-

continued, and the nation went to an all-volunteer military. Consequently, the matter of conscientious objection to military service has faded from national attention, although young men are still required to register with Selective Service when they reach their eighteenth birthday. Because the military draft is no longer in use, the attention of the Church to the subject of military service for its members has also waned.

If a military draft were reinstated, no good reason exists for one to refuse compliance with Selective Service requirements, since provisions are typically made for ways to discharge this duty in settings having little or nothing to do with the federal military. Although the Church has never discriminated against those who choose to enlist with the military in a non-combatant role, serving in an alternative capacity seems more desirable.

Scripture quotations were taken from the *New King James Version*, except where noted.

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Extra-Biblical Days

*As a result — not a cause — of redemption,
believers should avoid intermixing
Christianity with extra-biblical practices,
as in the common observances of Sunday,
Christmas, Easter, Lent, and Halloween.*

Our objection to the religious observance of the days listed above is based upon a Bible principle briefly expressed in Deuteronomy 12:30-32: “do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way . . . Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.”

Here God instructed His people not to imitate the worship practices of idolatrous peoples. God has an acceptable and proper way to be worshipped. God’s people are responsible for worshipping Him in the way He has ordained, and for not corrupting it with the ways of the pagans.

This principle is often repeated in the Bible (Jeremiah 10:2-5; 1 Corinthians 10:21; Ephesians 5:8-11), making clear that God desires His people to worship in purity and holiness, separating from non-biblical customs and practices. All observances and worship forms that are stained by association with idolatry, human philosophy, and traditions contrary to God’s commands are strictly forbidden. Instead, God’s people are to seek Him to determine how He desires to be worshipped so that they can walk in accord with His commands and the prescribed manner of service.

Throughout the Bible, principles are given to guide us in knowing what is appropriate in worship offered to God. For example, God re-

quires that His people worship Him exclusively. This frequent refrain of Scripture not only prohibits the worship of other gods but also forbids the imitation of false worship by engaging in their pagan rituals. These concepts are powerfully expressed in the first two of God's Ten Commandments to His covenant people (Exodus 20:2-5) and in many other texts in both Testaments (i.e. Exodus 23:13, 23, 24; Deuteronomy 12:4; Psalm 106:34-39; Jeremiah 10:2-4; Ezekiel 11:12; Mark 7:6-9; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Colossians 2:8; 1 John 5:21).

The observances of Sunday, Christmas, Easter, Lent, and Halloween are each stained by association with paganism and idolatry, misinterpretation of Scripture, and the traditions of disobedient men. Thus, we object to their observance as sacred times because they represent *a syncretism of God-given religion with the false religion of unbelievers*. Let us briefly outline the history of each of these observances to demonstrate their ungodly associations.

Sunday observance

Evidence of Christian observance of Sunday as a sacred day can be traced back as far as the mid-second century.¹ Over time many believers have come to the opinion that Sunday is a "Christian Sabbath" in place of the "Jewish Sabbath" and that the scriptural instructions regarding Sabbath now apply to the first day of the week. Others claim that Sabbath was abrogated in the new covenant and that Sunday should be observed in remembrance of Christ's resurrection. Still others place no spiritual significance on any day, but meet with others for

¹ The practice is mentioned in the *Didache* (14:1-5), the *First Apology of Justin Martyr* (Chapter 67), Ignatius' *Magnesiens* (9:1-3), and the pseudonymous *Epistle of Barnabas* (Chapter 15).

worship on Sunday mostly because of tradition.² Before we consider the post-biblical history of Sunday observance, we must answer the claim that the observance of Sunday is based upon Scripture.

The biblical case for Sunday observance rests on the following claims: 1) that Jesus Christ rose from the grave on Sunday morning, bestowing significance on the day; 2) that His resurrection appearances on the first day (Luke 24:13-31; John 20:19) and the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, allegedly falling on a Sunday, add special meaning to the day; 3) that Paul's meeting with Christians in Troas (Acts 20:7) was intentionally — not incidentally — held on a Sunday; 4) that Paul's instructions regarding offerings (1 Corinthians 16:2) show that believers were in the habit of assembling on Sunday; and 5) that "the Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10 is a reference to Sunday.

Let us address these claims in order:

1. A strong case can be made that Christ rose at the *end of the Sabbath day*, not at the *beginning of the first day of the week* (see "How Long in the Grave?" - Statement of Faith 2). In either case, Scripture never suggests that the day of His resurrection was to be observed as a sacred day or to become the "Christian Sabbath."

2. Christ did appear to His disciples on the first day of the week, but Scripture never conveys any sacred significance to the day on which these appearances occurred. Likewise, Pentecost,³ though it may have fallen on Sunday, has no influence on the continued sanctity of the seventh-day Sabbath.

3. According to Acts 20:7, Paul met with the believers in Troas in anticipation of his departure the next day. No mention is made that it was customary for Christians to meet on the first day of the week, that they considered it sacred, or that they understood it to be a "Christian Sabbath."

4. Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 16:2 do not require a meeting on Sunday. Instead, the language indicates a personal setting aside of funds or produce at home, not a church collection. The passage

² Henry Waterman, "The Lord's Day," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 3 H-L, Merrill C. Tenney, Gen. Ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1977), 961-972.

³ Pentecost would have fallen on the first day of the week only if Christ was crucified on a Friday.

says nothing of sacred significance being assigned to the first day of the week.

5. The “Lord’s Day” in Revelation 1:10 is not identified as any day of the week⁴; it more likely refers to the prophetic “day of the Lord.” Sunday is not mentioned here, and nothing in this passage or elsewhere associates the “Lord’s Day” with the first day of the week.⁵

If no Scripture can *legitimately* be used for Sunday observance, why were many believers beginning to observe that day about one century after Jesus’ death and resurrection? The main factors leading to observance of Sunday appear to be 1) anti-Semitism, 2) pagan influence, and 3) misinterpretation of Scripture.⁶ Already in New Testament times, the church was becoming increasingly Gentile, with Jews persecuting the fledgling Christian movement. In time this persecution led to resentment and hatred of Jews on the part of many Christians.⁷ This contempt for the Jews and all that was associated with

⁴ The ambiguity of the phrase “the Lord’s Day” is compounded by the fact that the adjective translated “Lord’s” (*kuriakos* in the Greek) is used only twice in Scripture: here in Revelation 1:10 and in 1 Corinthians 11:20, in reference to the “Lord’s” Supper. This makes any attempt to determine the meaning of this phrase rather difficult and speculative.

⁵ Indeed, Scripture gives very little insight into the identity of this day, and there is more biblical evidence to suggest that it may refer to the Sabbath (the only day of the week that God named, hallowed, and claimed as His own, and the day that Jesus claimed to be “Lord” of) or to the eschatological “Day of the Lord” than to the first day of the week.

⁶ For an in-depth discussion of these issues, see Samuele Bacchiocchi’s *From Sabbath to Sunday*. For an opposing viewpoint, see D.A. Carson’s *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*.

⁷ This fact is evidenced in the writings of several of the anti-Nicene church fathers and Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*. Consider, for instance this quote from the Church Father Ignatius: “It is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism [specifically meaning the keeping of the Sabbath], for Christianity did not believe in Judaism . . .” (*Magnesiensians* 10:3, available at www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-magnesiensians-lightfoot.html).

Judaism, combined with the pagan past of Gentile converts, many of whom had observed the first day of the week prior to conversion, opened the door to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Scriptures related to the Sabbath day and the first day of the week.

Thus in a process lasting some 250 years, observance of the weekly Sabbath was gradually replaced by the observance of Sunday within the early church.⁸ In AD 321 the Roman Emperor Constantine issued an edict declaring Sunday to be the “venerable day of the sun” and ordered that people abstain from work on it. In AD 363 the Church Council of Laodicea declared that Sunday was to be observed as the day of rest and the “Jewish Sabbath” was *not* to be observed by Christians.⁹ Thus the long and gradual process of change reached its culmination by AD 400. Although Sunday was not referred to as the “Christian Sabbath” until the twelfth century, it had been increasingly treated as such for several hundred years prior.

Thus the observance of Sunday is a man-made tradition contrary to the commandments of God. It is based upon misinterpretation of Scripture, accommodation to the pagan custom of honoring the first day, and an anti-Semitism that resulted in an anti-scriptural view.

Christmas observance

To avoid confusion, we begin by affirming full belief in the *biblical* accounts of Christ’s incarnation and birth. We rejoice in His willingness to come to earth and take on humanity in order to rescue us from our sins.

Whereas Christ’s birth was occasion for celebration, gift giving (to Jesus, not to others), and rejoicing when it occurred (Matthew 1 and 2; Luke 2), no scriptural basis exists for repeating this celebration. Thus we direct attention to the historical development of the holiday.

Ancient Romans held year-end celebrations for two of their false

⁸ Abraham E. Millgram, *Sabbath: The Day of Delight* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1947), 364.

⁹ Waterman, 968.

¹⁰ Robert J. Myers, “Christmas,” *World Book Encyclopedia*, vol. 3 C—Ch, (Chicago: World Book, 1985), 408.

gods: Mithras, the god of light, and Saturn, the god of the harvest.¹⁰ According to the Persian cult of Mithraism, Mithras was a miraculously born savior-god who was born of a woman, but of heavenly origin, and whose birth was attended by magi.¹¹ Saturn, the harvest god, was celebrated in a feast called Saturnalia each December 17-24 in gratitude for his blessings and in preparation for the winter solstice.¹²

These ancient festivals became very popular in the Roman Empire by the fourth century AD, due in large part to the fact that Emperor Aurelius was born on December 25 and was hailed as *Sol Invictus*, the “unconquerable sun.” A feast, entitled *Natalis Solis Invicti* (“birth of the unconquered son”) was held to honor him and associate him with the false god Mithras on December 25 each year.¹³ These celebrations were marked by the same elements that had been popular among the more ancient pagans and included feasting, decorating with greenery, singing and merry-making, gift giving, candles, the yule log, and was-sail bowl.¹⁴

During the fourth century, the developing Church of Rome borrowed this pagan celebration and repackaged it in honor of the birthday of Christ. The first recorded celebration of Christ’s birth was on

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- ¹¹ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 41, 116. See also Manabu Waida, “Incarnation,” *World Religions* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1987), 561.
- ¹² Gray Lambert, “Christmas,” *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 3 H-L, Merrill C. Tenney, Gen. Ed., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1977), 804.
- ¹³ Vivian Green, *A New History of Christianity* (London: Sutton Publishing, 1996), 26-27, and Justo L. Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1 The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1984), 96. See also the “Christmas” articles in *Eerdman’s Bible Dictionary*, *Laymen’s Bible Encyclopedia*, and *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*.
- ¹⁴ *The Laymen’s Bible Encyclopedia*, William C. Martin (Nashville: Southwestern Company, 1964), s.v. “Christmas.” See also the article on Christmas in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*.
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December 25, 336 (AD)¹⁵ — eleven years after the Council of Nicea. Initially the holiday was called the Nativity of Christ and was not known as “Christ’s Mass” until 1123. The shortened form of *Christmas* was first used in 1568.¹⁶

Thus we see that the celebration of Christ’s birth was inspired by, and rooted in, pagan festivals popular in the Roman Empire at the time. Scarcely a single element of the celebration was not adopted from those pagan holidays. The date, symbols, decorations, feasting, and traditions remained unchanged. The only difference is that Mithras, Saturn, and Emperor Aurelius were exchanged for Jesus Christ as the object of worship and celebration.

Despite efforts to “put Christ back into Christmas” and purge it of pagan elements, the modern celebration of the holiday (particularly in America) is consistently marked by the same pagan symbolism and trappings as in its origin, including the date, feasts, decorations, celebratory traditions, gift giving, and the very notion of celebrating a “savior’s” birth.

Easter observance

Again to avoid confusion, we affirm our belief and acceptance of the *biblical* accounts of Christ’s bodily resurrection from the dead, and we embrace the theological import of this event in Scripture: “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. . . . And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:14, 17, NIV).

However, no command exists to celebrate the *day* on which Christ rose, nor does any scripture indicate that any follower of Christ did so. Rather, along with His death, Christ’s resurrection was remembered and proclaimed in the annual commemoration of the Lord’s Supper and throughout the year in the preaching, teaching, and breaking of bread among believers.

¹⁵ Lambert, 804.

¹⁶ Arland J. Hultgren, “Christmas,” *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, Paul J. Achtemeier, Gen. Ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 163.

The word *Easter* erroneously occurs in the Bible's King James Version (Acts 12:4, where it should be translated "Passover"). The first post-biblical mention of the holiday that would eventually be called Easter¹⁷ was in a second century controversy between Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, and Anticetus, bishop of Rome concerning the proper date for Passover.¹⁸ It was the custom at that time for many in the East, including Polycarp, to keep the (Christian) Passover on the fourteenth day of Nisan, according to the Jewish calendar (cf. Leviticus 23:5). It was on this day that they commemorated Christ's death and resurrection.

Many in the West, including Anticetus, held the opinion that Passover should be celebrated on the Sunday *following* the fourteenth of Nisan.¹⁹ Those favoring this date sought to ensure that the resurrection of Christ would always be celebrated on a Sunday, the day they believed Christ rose and the day to which they had assigned sacred significance.²⁰

The Passover debate would continue for many years. In AD 190, Victor, bishop of Rome, actually excommunicated the Eastern churches of Asia for keeping Passover (i.e., Lord's Supper) on the biblical date! Agreement between the Eastern and Western segments of the church was not reached until the Council of Nicea (AD 325),

¹⁷ The mention of Easter in Acts 12:4 (KJV) is universally acknowledged to be a mistranslation of the Greek word *pascha*, which means "Passover."

¹⁸ Isaac Boyce, trans., *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), Book V, Chapters 23—25.

¹⁹ Cairns, 101.

²⁰ See our discussion on Sunday observance for more information regarding the sacred significance assigned to Sunday. Interestingly, insisting that the Resurrection be celebrated on a Sunday ensured that it would almost never be celebrated on the day it actually occurred. On the Hebrew calendar, the Passover falls on a different day of the week each year, and thus so would the Resurrection.

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where the Western date was accepted. From that time forward, most Christians have celebrated Christ's resurrection on the Sunday after the first full moon following the first day of spring in the Northern Hemisphere. It was also determined at the Council of Nicea that if this date-fixing process brought the Resurrection to fall on the actual day of Nisan 14, it should be postponed to the following Sunday so not to coincide with the biblical Passover!²¹ This decision was one of many steps throughout church history that effectively divorced the commemoration of the Lord's death and resurrection from its biblical roots, often under the thinly veiled anti-Semitic guise of avoiding "Judaizing."

For several hundred years following the Council of Nicea, the emerging Catholic Church adopted numerous symbols, customs, and practices from pagan fertility rites and mingled them with the resurrection celebration, including rabbits and pastel-colored eggs, both ancient symbols of fecundity.²² The word *Easter* is derived from the name of a pagan goddess, Eostre (or Astarte), who was honored in a fertility cult spring festival that pre-dated the celebration of Christ's resurrection.²³ The name was attached in the eighth century to the observance of Christ's resurrection. Thus the name and trappings of the modern-day Easter celebration find their origin in paganism, and the date is the result of a rejection of the Scriptural account of the timing of the Lord's death and resurrection.

²¹ *The Laymen's Bible Encyclopedia*, William C. Martin (Nashville: Southwestern Company, 1964), s.v. "Easter."

²² *Laymen's*, s.v. "Easter." See also the "Easter" articles in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, *The Laymen's Bible Encyclopedia*, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, as well as John F. Baldovin, "Easter," *World Religions* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 19987), 378, and Vivian Green, *A New History of Christianity* (United Kingdom, Sutton Publishing, 1996), 26-27.

²³ Reginald H. Fuller, "Easter," *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, Paul J. Achtemeier, Gen. Ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 233. See also the Easter articles in *Eerdman's Bible Dictionary*, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, and *The Laymen's Bible Encyclopedia*.

Lent

Those who observe Lent²⁴ do so with Christ's temptation in the wilderness and Jesus' final week in view. While fully accepting the biblical accounts of these events, we note that no Scripture indicates that any believers commemorated them nor implies that they should.

The celebration of Lent is closely associated with the celebration of Easter.²⁵ While some Christians observed a period of pre-Passover preparation prior to the Council of Nicea (AD 325), the more formal institution of Lent slowly developed in the Roman church of the post-Nicene era. Its early celebration focused on preparation for baptism²⁶ and often included a fast lasting from one day to two weeks.²⁷ Only later did Lent become formalized liturgically, and associated with public penance and a forty-day devotional preparation for Easter.²⁸

In contemporary practice, Lent is a forty-day period (excluding Sundays) beginning on Ash Wednesday in Catholic and Protestant churches²⁹ (on the Sunday preceding Ash Wednesday in Eastern Or-

²⁴ Lenten and the shortened form "Lent" come from the Old English word *lencten*, meaning "springtime" (cf. Bernard Ramm, "Lent," *World Book Encyclopedia*, vol. 12 L; Chicago: World Book, 1985), 175.

²⁵ See our earlier discussion on the observance of Easter.

²⁶ Passover was the traditional time for baptisms in the early post-biblical church.

²⁷ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), 205.

²⁸ *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, Paul J. Achtemeier, Gen. Ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), s.v. "Lent."

²⁹ Many early reformers and Protestants initially rejected the celebration of Lent as "Popery," that is, an invention of the Catholic pope without biblical grounds. However, as time has gone on, many Protestant churches now observe the Lenten season to some degree (cf. Latourette, 1424).

thodox churches³⁰) and ending on Easter. The time is given to fasting, prayer, and penance.

Lent culminates in what is commonly called Passion Week or Holy Week, during which time the last week of Christ's life is commemorated through various ceremonies on Palm Sunday (supposedly the day of the Triumphal Entry); Maundy Thursday (supposedly the day of the Last Supper); Good Friday (supposedly the day of the Crucifixion); Holy Saturday (supposedly the day of waiting and vigil during Jesus' entombment); and finally Easter Sunday (supposedly the day of Christ's resurrection).³¹ Lent is an important fixture on the church year/calendar for much of Christendom.³² With this history in mind, let us consider the objectionable elements of Lent.

First, since even those who celebrate Lent do not claim direct biblical precedent for it, it is a man-made tradition and should therefore be held subject to scrutiny. Second, the Lenten season is inextricably linked to Easter Sunday as observed by the Catholic Church following the Council of Nicea. Thus, the same unbiblical means of figuring the Easter date also produces the imaginary, unbiblical dates that are placed on the events during Holy Week.

Third, the Catholic Church's traditions regarding confession to a priest, sacraments, priestly duties, penance, disparaging marriage and godly sexuality and forbidding certain foods, etc. are all seen in dramatic display during the Lenten season. Thus Lent is closely associated with many failures of Catholicism to remain true to biblical authority and teaching. One can scarcely celebrate Lent without taking part in Catholic traditions that violate numerous biblical principles, concepts, and commands, or that, to echo Jesus' words, transgress God's commands in order to keep the tradition of men (cf. Matthew 15:3-9).

³⁰ The purpose of this initial meeting/mass is to remind the participants that they are but dust/ash (thus, "Ash" Wednesday) and that they need to devote the next forty days to humble confession of sins and the seeking of forgiveness through penance, including fasting.

³¹ Nancy E. Auer Falk, "Easter," in *World Book Encyclopedia*, vol. 6 E (Chicago: World Book, 1985), 25-26.

³² Including the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran churches, as well as churches that are part of the Anglican Communion. Many other Protestant groups hold religious services during the Lenten season in honor of the holiday. Cf. Ramm, 175.

Halloween

Those who celebrate Halloween claim no direct biblical support for it. Thus we proceed directly to the historical development of this “holy” day. We will track two historical lines to the modern celebration of Halloween — the Catholic Church and the practice of pagans in northwestern Europe — then point out how they intersect.

Halloween is inextricably linked to the Catholic veneration of saints.³³ The first mention of a festival that honored the departed “saints” is made by Saint Ephrem Syrus (d. AD 373). Saint Chrysostom (d. AD 407) noted that the date for this festival was the first Sunday after Pentecost.³⁴ Widespread celebration of this feast in the Western churches did not appear until about AD 609 when the Pantheon at Rome was dedicated to Pope Boniface IV for Christian usage as a church by the Roman Emperor Phocas.³⁵ From that point on, an annual commemoration was held for “All Saints” on May 13. The date was changed to November 1 by Pope Gregory III (d. AD 741), who dedicated a chapel in the basilica of St. Peter on that day.

³³ We will not deal in depth here with the issue of veneration of saints. Suffice it to say that what began as a habit of honoring Christian martyrs and heroes at their graves gradually devolved into praying for, and eventually praying to, the souls of departed Christians. Over time, the Catholic Church developed a great deal of legislation and liturgy related to this practice. While the Catholic Church is now careful to distinguish between the “veneration” and “worship” of saints, that distinction is often lost on many Catholics. For a more thorough treatment of this subject in the context of church history, read Vivian Green’s compelling book *A New History of Christianity* (United Kingdom, Sutton Publishing, 1996).

³⁴ This date is still observed by the Eastern Orthodox Church. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, F. L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), s.v. “All Saints Day.”

³⁵ Francis L. Filas, “All Saints’ Day,” *World Book Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 A (Chicago: *World Book*, 1985), 354.

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Later, Pope Gregory IV (d. AD 844) ordered the universal observance of All Saints Day by the Catholic Church.³⁶ The Mass said on this day was referred to as *Allhallowmas* (meaning, the “Mass of All Hallows/Saints”). The evening prior to Allhallowmas became known as *All Hallow e’even* (meaning, “the eve of All Hallows/Saints”) and eventually simply Halloween.³⁷ All Souls’ Day, held on November 2, was added later and became popularized through Odilo of Cluny, who in AD 998 commanded that the Benedictine houses of his order celebrate the feast annually. In 1915 Pope Benedict XV gave priests permission to celebrate three masses on All Souls’ Day, an honor otherwise reserved only for Christ’s Mass.³⁸

Having traced the Roman Catholic line, we turn to the pagan line of Halloween history. The ancient Celts of the British Isles and Northern France celebrated their new year on November 1. In conjunction with this feast was a festival held on the evening prior (October 31) to worship the Celtic lord of death, Samhain, whom they believed allowed the souls of the dead to return to their earthly homes for that one evening. The celebration marked the beginning of winter, death, decay, and cold, thus honoring the lord of death.

A company of pagan priests called Druids oversaw the Celts’ religious practices. The Druids called on the Celts to extinguish their hearth fires, and instead built a huge bonfire on which they burned oak branches, animals, crops, and possibly even people. From this bonfire each family would re-light their own hearth. The wearing of costumes made of animal skins and heads frequently marked the celebration. Oftentimes witches and Druids would tell people their fortunes based on the entrails of the animals they had sacrificed.

In AD 43 the Romans conquered the Celts and ruled their island homeland for some 400 years. During this time two Roman festivals were combined with the Celtic festival of Samhain. One of these feasts, called Feralia, was held in late October to honor the dead. The other festival honored the Roman goddess of fruit and trees, Pomona.

³⁶ *Oxford Dictionary*, s.v. “All Saints Day.”

³⁷ Carol Bain, “Halloween,” *World Book Encyclopedia*, vol. 9 H (Chicago: *World Book*, 1985), 24–26.

³⁸ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), s.v. “All Souls’ Day.”

The pagan peoples of the British Isles continued to celebrate these various festivals for centuries after their combination.

A variety of local customs related to the festivals developed, including one in Ireland that featured a parade honoring a false god, Muck Olla. During the parade, people begged for food from the people and homes they passed. The leader of the parade dressed in a costume composed of a white robe and the head of a dead animal. A variety of other customs developed, most of which related in some way to superstitions regarding the dead, evil spirits, witches, and magic. Many of the pagans who kept these festivals would eventually become a part of the Catholic Church, oftentimes through military or political conquest.³⁹

Endnotes

We now focus on the intersection of these two lines of history. In accordance with the unbiblical practice of venerating dead “saints,” the Catholic Church had early on determined that a day should be set aside to honor the souls of the dead. During the eighth century, this Catholic tradition was married to the Celtic/Roman pagan festivals of Samhain, Feralia, and Pomona that celebrated death and superstition. *World Book Encyclopedia* notes that Halloween came out of ancient festivals celebrating the new year and the dead. So that people could continue celebrating a festival they had observed before their conversion to Christianity, the Catholic Church selected November 1 to observe All Saints Day. As part of this holiday, people included old pagan customs.⁴⁰

The transfer of pagan concepts and customs from the Samhain fes-

³⁹ Bain, 25.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

tival to the Christian holiday is only too apparent, both in history and in the contemporary celebrations of Halloween. In England families celebrating Halloween often sit around bonfires eating apples and nuts (a clear corollary to the Celtic Samhain festival bonfire and the Roman goddess of fruit, Pomona). In many countries on All Souls' Day, the poor go "a-souling" (begging) and receive pastries called *soulcakes* in exchange for promises to say prayers for the dead. In America it is referred to as "trick-or-treating" and occurs on Halloween night (both evolved from the Muck Olla begging parade of Celtic paganism). Throughout the modern world, popular celebrations of Halloween include costumes, language, and traditions that demonstrate an obsession with witchcraft, the dead, evil spirits, magic, and superstition, just as the ancient Druid festivals did.⁴¹ The impact of paganism on this so-called "Christian" holiday is only too evident.

For Christians who understand these roots, the observance of Halloween in any form or fashion becomes highly objectionable. More obviously than any of the other days considered here, Halloween is evil, with nothing redemptive about it. May all those who serve the Lord of life, light, truth, and holiness forever avoid this pagan celebration of death, darkness, deception, and evil.

Conclusion

Given the origin and contemporary observance of these days, we call upon our fellow believers to forsake them. Instead, let us seek to worship God according to His prescribed patterns, rather than conforming to man-made traditions and pagan idolatry.

As the apostle Paul wrote, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

⁴¹ Ibid., 24-26.

“I will dwell in them
And walk among them.
I will be their God,
And they shall be My people.”

Therefore

“Come out from among them
And be separate, says the Lord.
Do not touch what is unclean,
And I will receive you.”

“I will be a Father to you,
And you shall be My sons and daughters,
Says the LORD Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

Scripture quotations are from the *New King James Version*, except where noted.

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Statement of Faith 11

Prophecy

Bible prophecy preserves and strengthens a believer's hope for the Second Advent. It identifies religious, social, and political trends and events, including the rebirth of the nation of Israel, which point to the imminent return of Christ and the eventual establishment of God's eternal kingdom on earth.

History in this world — this present age — is like a straight line with a period at each end. It had a definite beginning, and it will have a definite end.

This Christian view differs with other faiths that see history as circular, not linear. For example, some religions champion the idea of reincarnation that accents not the end of life or of the world, but the endless recycling of human lives.

The Bible, on the other hand, informs us that time, space, and all things had an origin: God created them at the start. Without knowing the exact age of the universe, we do know there was a time when it was not. Time began when space began. All this is reported in the Bible's first verse: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

Since the beginning, time has been moving along a straight line toward the end of history as we know it. We are headed somewhere — to a time and place we've never been before.

The same Bible that tells the start of this present world also tells us something of its end — not everything we'd like to know, but what we need to know. The data given in God's Word about what the future holds and the end of this age is one form of what is called prophecy.

Most biblical information about the world's start is found in the first book, Genesis. Likewise, a fair share of information about the end comes from the Bible's later books — the prophets in the Old Testament and Revelation in the New. These, in fact, may be labeled "books of prophecy," although prophetic chapters are scattered elsewhere. Fully 25 percent of the Bible is prophecy in some form.

Early gospel prophecy

The first prophecy of the Bible, encouragingly, is found in the book of beginnings, Genesis: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (3:15). This cryptic message needs only a little comparing in its immediate context (Genesis 3) and a little more with verses elsewhere (John 8:44; Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:31; Galatians 4:4; Romans 16:20) to discern its meaning: The snake in the garden signals hatred toward Eve and all her children. Though

Satan the serpent will continually damage human heels (i.e., our best earthly endeavors), still the woman's Seed (i.e., the Messiah Jesus) will inflict an eventually deadly wound upon the Devil and his dominion.

Called the *protoevangelion*, or "first gospel," Genesis 3:15 is one of a long line of Messianic prophecies that dot the Hebrew Bible. They are fulfilled in the life, death, resurrection, and return of Christ the Lord, as confirmed by many New Testament texts (Luke 24:25-27, 44-46, for example).

Hebrew prophets

Before turning to a specific type of Bible prophecy that anticipates the end of this age and second advent of our Lord Jesus, we note two or three varieties of prophecy in the Old Testament, beyond the Messianic (first advent) prophecies introduced above.

There is preaching, or "forth-telling," the Bible's most common type of prophetic material. Most of the Hebrew prophetic writings (Isaiah through Malachi) consist of then-present warnings and instructions to backsliding Israel and Judah, from about 800 BC through 440 BC. This too is prophecy in a biblical sense (see 1 Corinthians 14:1-5).

There is also predicting, or "foretelling," in the Hebrew prophets. Some of their warnings were accompanied with threats of what would happen in the near future if Israel refused the prophetic word and the called-for repentance. Many of these threats came to pass, particularly in the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities of God's special people, Israel.

There is apocalyptic prophecy, introduced in the Old Testament (Daniel, Zechariah) but seen most prominently in the Bible's last book. Apocalyptic refers to a prophetic style that moves beyond the ordinary give-and-take among nations in the present or near future,

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and sees a final great day of the Lord when normal human events will be replaced by God's super-normal intervention. Apocalyptic is characterized by mysterious visions and dreams, by fearsome beasts and extra-terrestrial personages, and by puzzling numbers. Its purpose is not so much to give humans a clear-channel view of the far-off future, but rather to comfort them in their trials and assure them that the final victory belongs to God and His people, though they suffer long before it comes.

Jesus, prophet par-excellence

Moving down history's time-line in this present world (or age), we look for biblical teachings that foretell what's in store for the earth and its inhabitants. What we find is this: A final day for humanity as we know it will come — a day when God's plan from heaven will interrupt and supersede all human plans and efforts on earth. Sometimes called "the great day of the Lord," this climactic day divides between this present age and the age to come (see Matthew 12:32b, for example). It is the crux of apocalyptic prophecy.

While the expectation of that final day when new heavens and earth will replace the present world exists in several Old Testament texts (Isaiah 11:1-9; 65:17ff; Daniel 2:44; 7:13, 14; ch. 12; Zechariah 14:1-15), it is not until the New Testament that such a scenario becomes the dominant viewpoint of the future. It certainly is the viewpoint of Jesus Christ, as demonstrated in the Olivet Discourse (or Little Apocalypse) that covers two chapters in Matthew (24, 25) and one each in Mark (13) and Luke (21).

It is outside our scope here to present a comprehensive summary of these four remarkable chapters. We remind the reader that the prologue to Jesus' discourse (Matthew 24:3; Mark 13:3, 4; Luke 21:7) prepares us for the fact that He will answer more than one question about the future and the time of His return.

Before addressing that ultimate issue, Christ responds to an earlier question of the disciples regarding the time when not one stone of the temple would be left upon another. From the order of the questions, we infer that His first answers in these chapters describe the intervening time between when He spoke and AD 68-70, when Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed by Roman armies. This is made

clear in Luke 21:24-28, where Daniel the prophet's "abomination of desolation" becomes the terrible fate of the Jewish people and their religious system at Roman hands — an event that occurred within one full generation of when Jesus prophesied it. A clear grasp of the significance of this Jewish disaster is crucial to understanding Jesus' prophetic teaching in the Gospels.

A major challenge for the student of Jesus' Olivet Discourse is in rightly dividing His answers. In response to the disciples' first question, there is a short-term prophecy of the temple's destruction, the fulfillment of which was experienced or witnessed in Jerusalem and Judea by many who lived when Jesus spoke it.

And there is a longer-term prophecy to be fulfilled in response to the disciples' second question. Regarding His coming and the end of the age, Jesus says, "Of that day and hour no one knows . . ." (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32). Don't try to calculate it; just watch, pray, and trust, lifting your hearts and purifying your hands so you won't be caught by surprise (Luke 21:28-36).

Beyond the Olivet Discourse, scattered texts appear in the Gospels in which Jesus expresses His confidence that the future kingdom of God was actually then present in Himself and that this kingdom would be culminated on a day when the Son of Man returns in power and glory, with His holy angels (Matthew 16:27; 26:64; Mark 8:38; Luke 17:20-37; see also John 14:1-3; Acts 1:10, 11).

Prophetic epistles

Not only in the sayings of Jesus, but also in the writings of the apostles the expectation that Jesus Christ will return to earth gets plenty of space. This may be the most frequent prophecy in all the written Word, appearing more than 300 times — at least once in most of the Bible's sixty-six books.

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The many references to Christ's return in the New Testament letters can be placed in two categories:

1. In paragraphs or chapters devoted mostly to this wonderful topic. Examples are 1 Corinthians 15, where the Second Advent is tied directly to the resurrection of the dead; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 and 5:1-11; and 2 Peter 3:1-18, where the writer warns those who may be tempted to think that, since Jesus has not yet returned after all those promises and all these years, He's not coming at all.

2. In shorter segments of a few words (Philippians 4:5b, for example) or a few verses (Romans 13:11-14, where the usual terms for Second Advent are absent, but the theme is unmistakable). Others worth reflection: Philippians 3:20,21; 2 Timothy 4:1ff; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:28; James 5:7-9; Jude 14, 15.

John's prophecy in vision

Revelation, the Bible's concluding book also known as the Apocalypse, provides an unrivaled example of this mysterious and magnetic prophetic form. Written at a time in the early church when Christians faced persecution from Roman powers that ruled the Mediterranean world, this book has for its core message "Fear not. Worship God and the Lamb on the throne. Hold fast to the faith of Jesus Christ and be obedient to God's commandments. The dragon, beast, and false prophet that oppose you will be destroyed! Christ comes quickly. Our God will reign forever in the new heavens and new earth prepared for His people."

Prophecy's purpose

Modern times offer many reasons to believe that we live in the closing scenes of history, that the second coming of Christ could happen very soon. The unprecedented events and world conditions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries include many "signs of the times" that support the imminence of His return.

For example, consider the return of the Jewish people to their promised homeland and the rebirth of national Israel in light of Luke 21:20-24 and other texts. Consider the exponential growth of human population and modern technology, the threat to humanity posed by

weapons of mass destruction and other potential disasters in light of Daniel 12:4 and Luke 21:25ff. To the careful student of Scripture, these may be more compelling than the common “signs” that have characterized most of human history, like earthquakes, famines, wars, love of pleasure, and general wickedness.

While some focus on the more sensational events they suppose must happen before Christ can return (rapture of the church, appearance of a final Antichrist, Great Tribulation upon Jews, etc.), doing so seems to ignore a more sure word of prophecy: the Lord’s sudden, surprising appearance during mostly normal times (see Matthew 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-30; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10).

More distress and trauma could be ahead for the world in the short-term future, to be sure, but we should avoid the temptation to use each new, darksome headline as another proof that Jesus will come in our lifetime. He may not. Prophecy is not given for us to speculate on the time of the end. Rather, it is given so that God’s people, in difficult times, can be comforted that history is headed somewhere and that all God’s promises for the last great day are in our favor!

For those without the assurance that faith brings, last-days prophecies can serve as a warning of what’s ahead for those who reject Jesus, the only refuge against coming storms. Yes, prophetic passages rightly used are valid tools and motivators in evangelism. Jesus Christ is coming again. Prepare to meet your God!

Modern Israel in the Bible

The existence of modern Israel, despite multiple dispersions, and a final return of the Jews to their Middle East homeland are foretold in Scripture:

- In promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: God’s promises of land and seed to His first “chosen people” were repeated and unconditional (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14, 15; 17:8; 28:4; 35:12; 48:4; 50:24). While many of these were fulfilled in Israel’s conquest

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and occupation of Canaan before the first coming of Christ, they contain elements of promise that easily overflow that era.

- In dealings with the nation under Moses and David: The Mosaic covenant included God's gracious pledge to return Israel from the furthest points He might drive them (Deuteronomy 30:1-6). The Davidic covenant repeats the idea of permanence (2 Samuel 7, esp. v. 10). Centuries of human failure later, God's oath remained unchanged (2 Kings 13:23).
- In the Psalms: Psalm 102:16 and its context (vv. 12-22) relate the Lord's coming with His work in rebuilding Zion (i.e., Jerusalem).
- In the Prophets: No less than eight prophets foretell a climactic restoration of the Hebrew people to their land (Isaiah 11:11, 12; 65:8, 9; Jeremiah 30:8-10; 31:7-12, 17, 35, 36; 32:37-44; 33:14-16; 46:28; Ezekiel 37:21-28; 38:8-16; 39:25-29; Hosea 3:4, 5; Joel 3:1-3, 14-21; Amos 9:11-15; Obadiah 15-21; Zechariah 12—14). No previous return (from Egypt, Babylon, etc.) can be considered a complete fulfillment of this cumulative prophecy.
- In the words of Jesus: Christ anticipated a great destruction and scattering of the Jewish people from Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-24a). He foretold that Gentile control of the city would not be permanent (v. 24b). In the restitution yet to come, the tribes of Israel will be judged and ruled by His apostles (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30).
- In the writings of Paul: Paul insisted that God was not finished with Israel according to the flesh. In Romans 9, 10, and 11 he asserts that God's plan still includes Abraham's literal seed, for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance (11:26-29).
- In the end of the age: The ultimate battle at Megiddo (Revelation 16:16), the return of Christ to Mount Olivet (Zechariah 14:1ff; Acts 1:10-12), and the vision of New Jerusalem from heaven (Revelation 21:10-12) all imply Israel's role in the final events of the age and in God's plan for eternity.

To erase the significance of modern Israel in Scripture, one would need to explain away all these texts, and more.

Are these the last days?

Our world has serious problems: environmental pollution; a one-world economy based on precarious foundations; serious moral and social struggles like abortion, pornography, divorce, diseases, drugs, malnutrition, terrorism, and the possibility of nuclear destruction. What a depressing picture!

But do all these problems prove that we live in the last days just before the return of Jesus Christ? Many Christians believe they do. Some have accepted a scenario of specific events that supposedly lead to a rapture and then the Second Coming, using biblical numerics to set a timetable.

To be sure, the end may be near, but there is great danger in so much preoccupation with eschatology. Let's consider more evidence — from the Bible and history.

Paul and other apostles evidently thought that the Messiah would return in their generation. Frequently, New Testament writers referred to their time as the “last days” or as the “last hour” (Acts 2:16, 17; Romans 13:11; Hebrews 1:1, 2; James 5:3; 1 John 2:18). These references suggest that all time since Christ's first advent can be considered as the end time or last days.

For all New Testament writers, it was the end. They all died, but the world went on. Down through the centuries, Christians have typically believed that they lived at the end of the age, that they would live to see the second coming of Christ, that the turmoil and problems of their day were sure signs of the end. Many Christians, including well-respected scholars, have set dates based on various “Bible” chronologies. Periods of 2300, 2520, 1260, 1290, 1335, and 1000 years have been manipulated in various ways to predict the end in the years 1000, 1844, 1914, 1975, 1988, 2011, and others. All these dates have two things in common: They made good sense to many people at the time, and they were all wrong.

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Why is there such a preoccupation with figuring out when Jesus will return and with seeing every evil as a sure sign of the end? One reason is that Christians long to be united with their Savior at the resurrection — a blessed hope indeed. Another reason is not so godly. It is the same reason people consult fortunetellers and astrologers: They are curious about the future. Unable to rest securely in the loving arms of their Creator, they want to know what lies ahead. And for every such individual, there is some Bible teacher ready with new proofs of how near the end is or of exactly when and how it will occur.

Pitfalls of prognostications

Someday someone might hit the right date. But in the meantime, millions of Christians are stumbling into pitfalls related to preoccupation with the nearness of the Second Coming.

Physical vs. spiritual protection: Christians have their priorities wrong by being more concerned with physical protection (from a great tribulation) than with spiritual protection from eternal death. The fear of suffering, not the fear of God and His ultimate eternal judgment, motivates them to be active in religion. Having a stockpile of staples, alternate sources of energy, land for growing food, etc., may prolong one's comfort for a few months or years in this life, but it is useless in eternity.

“Signs” vs. the gospel: Preaching the “signs” of the end can replace the preaching of the gospel of eternal salvation. For many, gloom and doom have become their gospel. The whole focus of their conversations and periodicals is what is wrong with our country and our world. These people are so preoccupied with the problems that they have little time or energy to preach the ultimate solution: salvation through Jesus Christ and the eradication of sin from our lives through the power of God's Spirit.

Biased perception: Preoccupation with the end of the world can lead to a biased perception of the real world. People so oriented see in history and in contemporary life only what fits their idea of what the end times will be. They see evidence of things getting increasingly worse, ignoring evidence of advancements in various areas of life. Those who see only one side of what's going on in the world become a laughingstock to those who see another side to the story.

Nationalized gospel and prophecy: Some Americans in particular tend to nationalize the gospel and prophecy — to see the fate of America as the fate of the world. In reality, the end of the US or Canada could come without the end of the world. History reveals that nation after nation, civilization after civilization, have decayed and crumbled. Given enough time, ours will undoubtedly do the same. But to equate the demise of America with the end of the world is a presumptuous leap of logic.

Disasters and judgment: Some who proclaim gloom and doom tend to equate all disasters with the judgment of God. For sure, America deserves judgment. But to equate natural calamity anywhere with God's punishment belies the important part such happenings have always played in balancing creation. For example, powerful hurricanes wreak destruction in some areas, but they also suck tons of moisture and drop it as life-giving rain in other areas.

Fatalistic attitude: Those who believe the Second Coming is immediate often adopt a fatalistic attitude and fall prey to a siege mentality: "There's nothing to be done about the world's problems. Don't prepare for any future. Just hole up and wait." Instead of working to solve problems, they say, "This is prophecy being fulfilled. The end is almost here. There's no need to do anything." By sitting on their hands when they should be actively involved, they fulfill their own prophecies and assure a worse world for their children.

Lifetime decisions: People make lifetime decisions based on the belief that the world will soon end. Some even face old age without children or mates or resources because in their youth, they believed the end was imminent. Others have rushed into ill-advised marriages because they thought time was short.

Calculations: Preoccupation with the end inevitably leads to date-setting and other foolish end-time scenarios. All these have failed in the past. Those who espouse them are an embarrassment to God's church.

Notes

The frequent message of the Bible is “Always be ready, always be doing the work of the Master, because you don’t know when He will return!”

Real message

Very possibly we do live in the last days. But how sad that all the gloom and doom, all the end-time prognostication, all the date-setting obscure the real message of Christianity. The fact is that it is the end time for this generation. All of us will die. And unless we have accepted Jesus Christ as personal Savior and received the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are not ready for our end.

On the other hand, if we have become a child of God through Jesus Christ, then we are already sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Whatever happens in the kingdoms of this earth, our eternal future is secure as long as we continue in Christ by faith.

What happens on this earth is of great consequence to our children and us in the physical realm. Whether or not freedoms and blessings continue in our homelands should be of great concern to Christians. But whatever the freedoms, whatever the blessings in this life, they will ultimately end. The only ultimate freedom, the only ultimate blessing, the only ultimate security is in the eternal, spiritual realm: the kingdom of God.

Scripture quotations are from the *New King James Version*.

Notes

Statement of Faith 12

*The Kingdom
of God*

The kingdom of God (kingdom of heaven) is realized in three phases:

***The present kingdom.** The spiritual kingdom of grace exists now as God rules in the lives of obedient believers. This kingdom was announced and revealed through the prophets and the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. We enter this kingdom when we turn from our sin to serve God through faith in Jesus Christ.*

***The millennial kingdom of Christ.** Jesus will return to earth in power and glory to resurrect the righteous dead, bestow immortality and eternal*

life upon the resurrected and the living righteous, avenge the saints, and be glorified in them. His earthly reign of one thousand years will be a universal kingdom in which all principalities, powers, and enemies are overcome. At its conclusion, the unrighteous will be resurrected to suffer annihilation at the great white throne judgment.

The eternal kingdom of God. God's eternal kingdom will begin when Jesus Christ, having put all enemies under His feet, turns the kingdom over to the Father. God will dwell with the redeemed in a new heaven and a new earth where no disappointment, defilement, or death can enter and where righteousness and peace will prevail forever.

The Bible describes God as having many roles. We meet Him in the sacred pages as creator, sustainer, king, lawgiver, and judge of the universe; as covenant-maker and redeemer for the elect; and as heavenly Father for those who become the children of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

In this chapter we consider God as king, the sovereign ruler of all things. Whatever happens in time and eternity passes first through the divine counsel. Nothing escapes His knowledge or frustrates His plan. Our God reigns!

He is the King eternal (1 Timothy 1:17), the “blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings . . .” (6:15, NKJV). He is the Lord of heaven and earth (Acts 17:24) who reigns over all (1 Chronicles 29:11, 12). Eternity is an attribute of God, and we are not surprised to read that His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom (Exodus 15:18; Psalm 10:16; 29:10; 145:11-13; Jeremiah 10:10).

Among the children of men, the Lord God omnipotent rules (Revelation 19:6). This suggests a working definition for the kingdom of God: it is that realm where He rules and reigns.

Any kingdom comprises at least three components: a king to rule, subjects over whom the king rules, and a domain, or territory, for his reign. In the case of God's kingdom, He is the king. His subjects include all creatures that submit to Him, but especially the people He has created and redeemed through grace.

As domain for God's kingdom, we think first of heaven, where God's subjects are the angels and His will is perfectly done. Jesus' model prayer expands the domain: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done *in earth*, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10, KJV). The kingdom whose throne is in heaven, then, is established anywhere on earth His will is obeyed.

(Throughout this study, we use the phrase *kingdom of heaven* as a synonym for the *kingdom of God* on earth. These two phrases are used interchangeably in the Bible, as the following verses demonstrate: Matthew 8:11, compared with Luke 13:28; Matthew 5:3, compared with Luke 6:20; and Matthew 19:23 compared with verse 24.)

Seeking for understanding of God's kingdom and the central role it plays in Scripture, let us consider the topic under three headings: God's kingdom in the present, the millennial kingdom to come, and the eternal kingdom of God.

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The Present Kingdom

As we have seen, the kingdom of God is an eternal realm. God has always been King of heaven. Here on earth, His kingdom began with creation and in Eden, where His will was done until Adam and Eve disobeyed. Despite the fall of the human race into sin, God's sovereignty has continually been revealed in the lives of faithful men and women He has redeemed and ruled in every generation (see Hebrews 11).

After the call of Abraham, the patriarchs, and Moses, God's kingdom became known on earth principally through the nation of Israel (Exodus 19:5, 6; 1 Chronicles 28:5). For the first few hundred years after her birth, Israel was a theocracy (i.e., a government by divine right) where God ruled through Moses, Joshua, and the judges — like Samuel.

Toward the end of Samuel's days, the people rejected the theocracy and insisted that an earthly king should rule over them instead. In receiving Saul as king, the people were told that they had not rejected Samuel, but God himself, as their sovereign ruler (1 Samuel 8:1-8).

The kingdom of God took a turn at this point, but God's plan can never be thwarted and His kingdom did not cease. The second Israelite king, David, was a more godlike monarch than Saul. God promised David that his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16), that he would never lack a son to rule God's people (Psalm 89:3, 4, 27-37; Jeremiah 33:15-26).

In these promises is the assurance that God's kingdom is a permanent institution among men. Although the line of kings from David's loins was interrupted after 400 years when Judah was taken to Babylon (Ezekiel 21:25-27), still God's promise remained intact, leaping past the literal to the spiritual son of David, Jesus, who became heir to the kingdom throne (Isaiah 9:6, 7; Luke 1:32, 33).

When Jesus Christ, David's greater son, came preaching and teaching, He capitalized on the kingdom theme. "Repent," He exhorted the crowds that attended His ministry, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17, NKJV).

Similarly, Mark 1:14, 15 reports how our Lord introduced His kingdom message: "Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the king-

dom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel” (NKJV). Here, the message of the kingdom is called “the gospel” and heaven’s kingdom is realized in the human family as people believe Christ and repent of their sins.

The core of Jesus’ message in the Gospels confirms that the kingdom of God indeed came to those who heard, believed, and followed Christ. The proof of its royal presence would be seen in the defeat that Jesus consistently inflicted upon the opposition. Satan’s kingdom of poverty, blindness, captivity, brokenness, oppression, and death had been invaded by the Son of Man. Men and women were continually set free by Him to follow the Lord in liberty of life — body, soul, and spirit. In the person and work of Christ, God’s kingdom had come and triumphed: The everlasting promise was being fulfilled!

Let us review the biblical evidence that God’s kingdom is truly present in the person and ministry of the Lord Jesus. He said, “But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28). He told the chief priests and elders of Judaism who were daily refusing His message and ministry, “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (21:43). So the kingdom was not only present in Jesus but also nearing a change of citizenry.

On another occasion, the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom would come, and He replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20, 21).

Taking our cue from these sayings of Christ, we may refer to the present phase of God’s kingdom as the spiritual kingdom, or the kingdom of grace. God is its king, Christ’s disciples are its subjects, and the hearts and lives of the redeemed are its domain. Our God reigns!

The kingdom that Jesus focused His message on is already pres-

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ent. Leadership of this kingdom was taken from Israel's priesthood and given to the apostles of Jesus and Christian servants of God. This phase of God's kingdom still exists in the Christian church, where millions give their allegiance to God, through Jesus Christ.

In affirming the reality of the present kingdom among and within the people of Christ, we also recognize that, in another sense, the kingdom of God is yet to come. This truth also is seen in the teachings of Christ and His apostles. Hear it in Jesus' words to the crowd — "And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11, NKJV) — and to the disciples at the Last Supper: "For I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:18).

These sayings of Jesus imply that the kingdom had not yet come in its public and final forms, but was anticipated at some unknown point in the future. Jesus Christ was not then physically ruling and reigning over all the earth, nor would He do so until His return.

The remainder of the New Testament supports the concept we have seen in the Gospels: God's kingdom is already here in the hearts and lives of Christians, but it is not yet here in its ultimate, glorious form.

The Millennial Kingdom of Christ

It is true that Christians enjoy God's rule and reign in their lives today, freeing us from Satan's regime and enabling us to experience many of the blessings promised to those who love God now. It is also true that not all the promises are yet realized by believers, and will not be until the next phase of His kingdom is inaugurated at Christ's second coming. This future phase is the millennial kingdom, Jesus' reign of peace on earth.

This marvelous age to come will be introduced by Christ's return and the resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:21-23ff; 2 Timothy 4:1; Revelation 19:11—20:6). In this great day of the Lord, those who belong to Jesus, whether dead or alive, will be changed from mortal to immortal and will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17), before descending with Him as He returns to begin the millennial reign on earth (Zechariah 14:1ff; Acts 1:10-12).

To grasp the purpose and content of the coming golden age for the earth and its inhabitants, several scriptures will be surveyed. While only one of these mentions 1,000 years as the length of this age to come, each scripture points to a time of peace and righteousness that has been promised to, but never yet experienced by, all God's people on earth.

Several of the psalms support millennialism, envisioning the blessed reign of a Messianic king over God's people and all the nations. Psalms 2 (vv. 6-9 in particular) and 72 are prime examples of this.

The promise of a glorious Messianic kingdom resounds through the Hebrew prophets. Four familiar passages in Isaiah picture an ideal, earthly future for God's people prior to the final consummation. These are: 1) Isaiah 2:2-4, where the promise is that the Lord's word will go from Jerusalem to teach all nations during a time of unprecedented peace; 2) Isaiah 9:6, 7, which introduces the promised

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divine Son, who is to govern peacefully from David's throne; 3) Isaiah 11:1-9, where a Branch from Jesse (i.e., from David), will judge and rule the earth in righteousness so extensive that even wild animals will become harmless; and 4) Isaiah 65:17-25, the prophecy that Jerusalem will become a source of unprecedented joy in a renewed earth, where all peoples will celebrate the fruit of their labors without fear.

The same ideal future for God's people echoes through the other prophets. See, for example, Jeremiah 23:5, 6; 33:14-18; Daniel 2:44; Micah 4:1-8; and Zechariah 14:3-9. This string of texts forms the backbone for our understanding that the present spiritual kingdom of God will someday be transformed into a benevolent, worldwide dictatorship at Christ's return from heaven. Under His reign righteousness will finally cover the whole earth as the waters now cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

The ideas of a golden Messianic (millennial) age flow on into and through the New Testament in such texts as Matthew 25:31ff; Luke 1:32, 33, 68-79; 1 Corinthians 15:23-28; and Revelation 19:11-21 — to mention only a few.

Jesus and His apostles understood there would be a time of restoration and restitution on earth after Christ's return. In Acts 3:20, 21 apostle Peter says that God will send Jesus to earth, though He is now in heaven "until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (NKJV).

With no specifics here, what did Peter have in mind about restoration? Surely he would be thinking of the prophets' promises of a bright future for God's people here on earth, bringing them liberty and peace in the house of David's seed — the Messiah. Thus, many old prophecies from Isaiah and others will find their truest fulfillment in the millennial kingdom of the coming Christ!

In Matthew 19:28 Jesus describes the time of His coming like this: "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (NKJV). Note the elements here that harmonize with other prophecies cited above: Jesus coming to sit on His throne and judge the peoples, including Israel; and regeneration. This is the millennial kingdom.

The coming of Jesus will usher in a new era of the kingdom of heaven, where Christ will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. By

this heavenly intervention, the meek will gain possession of their inheritance: planet earth (Matthew 5:5; Revelation 5:10). Although this wonderful age-to-come will begin with the forced subjection of earth's carnal kingdoms, it will usher in a time of peace and joy in which the meek will be perfectly at home.

How long does it last? The only Bible passage to specify the length of Christ's coming kingdom on earth is Revelation 20:1-7, where a 1,000-year reign is mentioned six times. The nature of the 1,000-year reign, according to this primary source, may be summed up as the binding of Satan (vv. 1-3), a judgment scene (v. 4a), and the reign of the righteous as kings and priests with Christ on the earth (vv. 4b, 6).

And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years (20:4b, 6).

The Revelation 20 scene then moves to the millennium's finale and postlude: Satan is loosed; the nations gather against Christ's kingdom and are destroyed; and the last resurrection and great white throne judgment occur, with final rewards given to the righteous and destruction to the wicked (vv. 7-15). Though these nine verses describe the millennium's great climax, they do not add greatly to our understanding of the 1,000 years themselves.

One further text, 1 Corinthians 15:23-28, goes beyond any other to fill in the millennial outline of Revelation 20, confirming that a period of time will intervene between Christ's second advent and the final consummation of God's kingdom in eternity. Read it carefully, noting especially those words and phrases that indicate passage of time:

Verse 23: "But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming."

Verse 24: "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to

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God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.”

Verse 25: “For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.”

Verse 26: “The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.”

Verse 27: “For ‘He has put all things under His feet.’ But when He says ‘all things are put under Him,’ it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted.”

Verse 28: “Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (NKJV).

Close review of this passage confirms 1) that Jesus will reign for an unspecified time after His return, and 2) that only after He has defeated all enemies, including death, will He then deliver up the kingdom to His Father so that God may become everything to everybody. Here at last is the perfect ending that will go on forever. Although the length of Christ’s intervening rule goes unstated in 1 Corinthians 15, the sequence of events in this passage agrees nicely with the millennium of Revelation 20.

Combining the texts that foretell Christ’s millennial kingdom of peace, we conclude that redeemed persons will be transformed to immortality at Christ’s return, to rule and reign with Him 1,000 years. During that time Jesus will rule all nations with a rod of iron, and many of the unredeemed will evidently live on to be taught God’s truth from Zion.

Because the only passage specifying the 1,000-year length of Christ’s coming reign on earth is in the book of Revelation (20:1-6), some have seen this period as symbolic rather than a literal kingdom or length of time. This has given rise to various millennial views like a-millennialism — the belief that the 1,000 years correspond with Christ’s present spiritual reign from heaven in the hearts of His people. A second variant view, known as post-millennialism, teaches that the Lord’s return will happen only *after* a lengthy period in this age, during which the gospel message will result in a virtual Christianizing of the earth.

By contrast, the Church of God (Seventh Day) holds a pre-millennial view of Revelation 20. We understand that the millennium is a literal age that begins when Christ returns to earth (Revelation

19:11-21) and the righteous dead are raised (1 Corinthians 15:20-23; 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Rapture; final fate of the wicked

One Bible passage in particular—I Thessalonians 4:13-17—teaches that the living and resurrected saints will be “caught up” from the earth at Jesus’ return to meet the Lord as He comes with His holy angels. This text says nothing about a “secret” catching away of the church, but a noisy “shout . . . voice of an archangel, and . . . trumpet of God” (NKJV) instead, as the righteous dead are raised and the righteous living join them to welcome their returning Lord in the air.

Where will the saints be taken on that glorious occasion? Many theories have been expounded:

- The righteous proceed to heaven with Jesus to reign with Him forever there.
- The righteous proceed for a few years to a place of safety from the Great Tribulation, then return with Christ to the earth.
- Having met Christ in the air, the righteous proceed with Him to heaven for 1,000 years.
- Having been caught up to meet Christ in the air, the righteous return with Him to the Mount of Olives to participate in subduing the nations drawn up in battle against Jerusalem.

Of these explanations, we understand the last to be the correct one, inasmuch as it combines the teachings of Acts 1:9-12; Zechariah 14:1-9; and Isaiah 2:1-4, considered earlier. We reject the popular rapture notion that Jesus comes secretly “for” the church and takes her to heaven for a time prior to His public coming “with” the church.

For further evidence that God’s eternal kingdom will include many pleasant and familiar elements of our earthly existence, the reader may consult these texts: Psalm 37:11, 22, 29, 34; Isaiah 45:18; Matthew 5:5; 1 Corinthians 15:35-54; and Revelation 5:10.

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Based on the everlasting mercy of God and the many texts that speak of the final fate of the wicked as “perishing, “death,” and “destruction,” we reject the common view that the wicked will suffer the torments of hellfire for all eternity. Rather, we believe they will be utterly destroyed and become as if they had never been (Obadiah 16b; John 3:16; Romans 6:23; Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Malachi 4:1-3; Matthew 10:28b; Revelation 21:8).

The Eternal Kingdom of God

With the fulfillment of all that's previewed in Revelation 20 and its correlative texts, the millennial era of God's kingdom will have been completed. All of the dead will have been raised, and the unbelieving judged at the great white throne. The wicked will have been destroyed in the lake of fire, along with the Devil and hell — the grave. Sin and death will have been destroyed forever.

With the culmination of these events, the faithful redeemed will be ushered into the final and everlasting era of the kingdom, during which God's people dwell with Him — and He with them! — in the heavenly Jerusalem forever! This is the new heavens and new earth wherein dwells only righteousness (2 Peter 3:13), described in the Bible's closing chapters, Revelation 21 and 22.

To paint anything like a complete picture of what God has in store for those who love Him is not possible, because it hasn't yet entered our hearts and minds (1 Corinthians 2:9). The Spirit has provided a few eternal insights through the Word, however (v. 10), so we turn there for a preliminary glimpse:

- The Holy City descends from heaven as the ultimate residence for both God and man, now in perfect covenant relationship (Revelation 21:1-7).
- The city, described as a perfect cube more than 1,000 miles on each edge, is composed of the most precious and beautiful materials. Both Hebrew and Christian components are included in the construction (vv. 10-21).
- The best of human honor and earthly achievement will be incorporated into the City (Revelation 21:24, 26), while sorrow and pain, sin and death will be forever excluded (vv. 4, 8, 27; 22:15).
- The glory of God, the light of the Lamb, and the river of life provide all that's needed for perfect healing and wholeness — world without end (21:22, 23; 22:1-5).

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Other texts that apparently refer to this “heavenly city” are Psalm 46:4; Isaiah 25:8; 65:17; 66:22; Daniel 12:3; Matthew 13:43; John 14:2; Hebrews 11:10, 16; and 2 Peter 3:13. In other verses it is described as “eternal life,” “eternal glory,” or “the glory that shall be revealed.”

For many Christians, this time and place of eternal peace and perfection is known simply as *heaven*. This word, used alone, is more the Bible’s designation for God’s current realm than it is for the domain that He and humanity will someday share.

From popular belief, one might suppose that “going to heaven” would be a prominent biblical theme. It is not. Surprisingly, the Bible says little about people going away to God’s heaven, either when they die or any other time. Few verses, if any, support this popular notion. The term *kingdom of heaven* is an equivalent phrase for *kingdom of God*. It speaks of the character and ruler of the kingdom much more than its location.

Where, then, will the eternal inheritance of the saints be? The Bible’s message focuses not on our going there but on God’s coming here in the person of His Son, once and again to complete the redemption of all things — His entire creation — for all eternity (Ephesians 1:10). This is the promised new heavens and new earth. This is the New Jerusalem that will come down from God, *out of heaven* (Revelation 21:1, 10).

Common, generic belief holds that Christians at least, if not every good person, die and go directly to heaven. Careful examination of the Scriptures, however, suggests another truth: The great future God has in store for His people — those who entrust themselves to Christ — is better described as the eternal kingdom of God. It is not entered at death but at the resurrection of the dead, when Jesus returns. Its ultimate expression will be experienced at the end of Christ’s earthly reign, as the Holy City of Revelation 21 and 22 descends from heaven. Then we will truly enjoy the new heavens and the new earth, forever!

While the kingdom of God may be analyzed in terms of its progressive unfolding through the ages (as this chapter does), it is important to see it also in terms of its unity. Indeed, there is only one kingdom, one King, and one people of God over which He reigns forever.

We enter the kingdom of God when we, in obedient faith and repentance, turn to our Lord Jesus Christ. We will continue in His

kingdom when we are resurrected from the dead (or are changed to immortality in a moment) at His return, to rule and reign with Him for 1,000 years. When the millennial age ends, we will be eternally in that same heavenly kingdom, at home with God and the Lamb in the New Jerusalem, coming down to the earth made new.

The Lord God omnipotent reigns forever!

Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, except where noted.

Notes

Addendum

Statement of Faith Church of God (Seventh Day)

Introduction

The Church of God (Seventh Day) endeavors to carry out the Great Commission by discipling people for the Lord Jesus Christ through evangelism and instruction from the Word of God. To assist the Church in this, the North American Ministerial Council, comprising the Church's ministerial body, has adopted the twelve statements of belief in this booklet to introduce the Church's teaching and practice. While the Church has always maintained an open creed, these statements preserve its theological heritage, and present its latest and best understanding of Scripture.

1. The Holy Bible

The Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is God's inspired Word. Inerrant in its original writing, the Bible is the only authoritative and infallible rule of faith and conduct for humanity.

2. The Deity

The sovereign deity of the universe is God Almighty, who is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. He is eternal, infinite, holy, self-existent Spirit who created, sustains, rules, redeems, and judges His creation. He is one in nature, essence and being. God is revealed in Scripture as Father and Son.

GOD THE FATHER

God the Father of whom are all things, whom no one has seen nor can see, reigns in the heavens and transcends our complete knowing. He is revealed as our loving heavenly Father by His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Ultimately, God the Father will restore perfect harmony to all creation through Christ and reign eternally over the redeemed.

JESUS THE SON

Jesus Christ is God's one and only begotten Son. As begotten, not created, He shares the nature, names, and attributes of God with the Father. As Son, not Father, Jesus is subordinate to His Father in rank. From eternity, the Son was with the Father, shared the Father's glory as the pre-incarnate Word, and with Him created and sustains all things. Jesus the Christ (Messiah) was born of the virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, thus uniting two natures — human and divine. Jesus lived without sin, died as an atoning sacrifice for sin, was entombed for three days and three nights, was resurrected bodily, and ascended to His Father to serve as mediator and high priest. He reigns as Lord in heaven and will return to earth as judge and king. Now it pleases the Father that the Son is preeminent in all things and receives our worship.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the promised divine helper who proceeds from the Father and Son. The Spirit is God's presence and power in the world and indwells believers. By the Holy Spirit, God inspired and illuminates the Scriptures; convicts and regenerates sinners; sanctifies, teaches, comforts, guides, and preserves believers; and empowers them for service. Evidences of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life are faith in Christ, obedience to God, and the spiritual fruit of love.

3. Man, Satan, Sin, and Death

Humanity was created in the image of God as sinless, but not naturally immortal. Sin entered the world when Adam and Eve yielded to the temptation of God's adversary, Satan. The Devil, capable of transforming himself into an angel of light to deceive and destroy

humanity, will finally be destroyed in the lake of fire. As a result of Adam's fall, all humanity became sinners by nature and by choice. The result is spiritual separation from God, physical death in an unconscious state, and eternal death for those who do not receive salvation in Christ.

4. Man, Salvation, and Life

Sinful humanity may be saved from the penalty of eternal death and receive eternal life instead, solely by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from human merit, works, or ceremonies. Atonement for sins, with its attendant promise of eternal life, comes through Christ's death and resurrection on our behalf and is received in human experience by faith and repentance.

5. The Church

The church of God in Scripture is a spiritual body of believers who hold the faith of Jesus and keep the commandments of God. Under the lordship of Christ and the authority of His Word, the church exists universally and locally for purposes of worshipping God, preaching the gospel, nurturing believers, and serving humanity. Christians should participate in the church's mission by service to others and fellowship with believers.

6. Christian Ordinances

Christ prescribed two ordinances that confirm faith in Him: 1) water baptism, preceded by a confession of faith in Christ and repentance, represents the believer's initial union with Christ by depicting death to sin, burial by immersion in water, and rising to a Spirit-controlled life; and 2) Lord's Supper, a memorial to Christ's atoning death. Believers commemorate Christ's death by eating the bread of communion and drinking from its cup, symbols of His broken body and shed blood, thus demonstrating fellowship with our Savior until He returns. It is accompanied by the washing of feet. We observe this

Supper annually in the season it was instituted and are charitable toward those who observe it at other times.

7. The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments were known and obeyed by faithful people before the law was given at Sinai. Later incorporated into the new covenant by the example and teaching of Christ, they constitute the basic moral code for humanity and are obeyed to demonstrate the believer's love for God and his fellowman.

8. The Sabbath

The seventh-day Sabbath is God's gift to humanity from creation, was written into the Ten Commandments by God's finger, kept and taught by Jesus, and observed by the apostolic church. A memorial of both creation and redemption, the Sabbath should be faithfully celebrated by believers now as a day of rest, worship, and well-doing.

9. Marriage

Marriage is an institution of God and is an exclusive lifetime union between one man and one woman for the purpose of perpetuating humanity and enriching human experience. Reflecting the bond between Christ and His church, marriage may be broken only by sexual immorality. Like the Sabbath, marriage dates to Creation week, is intrinsic to the moral law, is reformed in Christ's teachings, and finds its ultimate meaning at His return.

10. Christian Living

Christians are called to holiness in thought, word, and deed and to express faith in Christ through devotion to God and godly interaction with others. As a result — not a cause — of redemption, believers

should 1) develop relationship with God through Bible reading and study, prayer, fasting, worship, and obedience; 2) relieve the physical and spiritual needs of humanity by compassionate social action and gospel witness; 3) oppose pride, envy, indolence, lust, covetousness, and other evils in the spirit; 4) refuse immoral amusements and practices such as pornography, sexual immorality, and homosexuality in the flesh; and 5) observe these Bible principles: give tithe and freewill offerings for the support of the church and its gospel ministry; eat for food only those meats the Bible describes as “clean”; regard participation in physical warfare as contrary to a Christian’s humanitarian calling; avoid intermixing Christianity with extra-biblical practices, as in the common observances of Sunday, Christmas, Easter, Lent, and Halloween.

11. Prophecy

Bible prophecy preserves and strengthens a believer’s hope for the Second Advent. It identifies religious, social, and political trends and events, including the rebirth of the nation of Israel, which point to the imminent return of Christ and the eventual establishment of God’s eternal kingdom on earth.

12. The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God (kingdom of heaven) is realized in three phases:

THE PRESENT KINGDOM

The spiritual kingdom of grace exists now as God rules in the lives of obedient believers. This kingdom was announced and revealed through the prophets and the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. We enter this kingdom when we turn from sin to serve God through faith in Jesus Christ.

THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM OF CHRIST

Jesus will return to earth in power and glory to resurrect the righ-

teous dead, bestow immortality and eternal life upon the resurrected and the living righteous, avenge the saints, and be glorified in them. His earthly reign of one thousand years will be a universal kingdom in which all principalities, powers, and enemies are overcome. At its conclusion, the unrighteous will be resurrected to suffer annihilation at the great white throne judgment.

THE ETERNAL KINGDOM OF GOD

God's eternal kingdom will begin when Jesus Christ, having put all enemies under His feet, turns the kingdom over to the Father. God will dwell with the redeemed in a new heaven and a new earth where no disappointment, defilement, or death can enter and where righteousness and peace will prevail forever.

