

A Preacher Contends for the Faith

**Sixty Newspaper Articles
by J. C. Townsend**

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Dedication

To J. C. and Lu Townsend

To faithful preachers

To the work of evangelizing using the print media

Introduction

J. C. Townsend preached for the Orangeburg, South Carolina, church of Christ for ten years beginning in 1979. During the five-year period from 1981 to 1986, J. C. wrote and published these 60 articles in the Orangeburg newspaper, *The Times and Democrat*.

The Orangeburg church of Christ published the articles on a monthly basis. J. C. wrote the articles to fit a two column by five-inch advertisement space. In editing them, we have made sure that they are all of equal size for those who might want to re-publish them in their own newspapers. Five years of articles, if published once each month, are presented, edited and suitable for publication.

The hope and prayer of the congregation is that these articles might be useful to preachers and congregations who want to pursue newspaper evangelism, but lack the means and time to write and develop such articles as these by J. C. Churches and individuals may reproduce the articles that will fit the two-column ad space. They are also suitable for church bulletins.

J. C. Townsend was a preacher with great intellect and understanding. Unassuming in all his ways, he quietly accomplished great things for the Lord. We found these articles in the church office years after he had moved from Orangeburg. J. C. had carefully preserved the articles in notebooks for some future usefulness to the Lord's cause. One can easily see the breadth and depth of J. C.'s knowledge by reading the articles. J. C. held masters degrees in both Old and New Testaments from Harding College. He finished his career as a professor of language, history, and Bible at the Alabama Christian School of Religion. Among his works is *A History of Churches of Christ in Florida with Other Related Stories: 1869-1949*, J. C. Townsend, Edited and Compiled by Geraldine McLeod Thompson, 2003.

J. C. fulfilled his preaching and teaching duties against all odds. In 1970, his doctors diagnosed him with Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS), giving him about six to eighteen months to live. No matter what difficulties the disease presented, one could always see J. C. around town, making his calls and performing his duties. His sermons and classes were always thoughtful, accurate, and well delivered. On January 15, 1999, twenty-eight productive and hardworking years after having been diagnosed with ALS, J. C. passed away. The Orangeburg church offers these articles in memory of a great preacher and teacher of God's word—J. C. Townsend.

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Being Christians Only

Have you considered the possibility of being just a non-denominational Christian? Are you one of the many searchers for truth? Do the many divisions within Christendom confuse you? You will find your answers looking to Jesus and His inspired word (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16). There you will learn that Jesus established His church fifty days after His resurrection—hundreds of years before the religious divisions as they are today came into existence (Mt. 16:13-20; Mark 9:1; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:4-8; Acts 2:1-47).

The early disciples were all in one church (Eph. 4:4; Eph.1:22-23). They were called simply Christians (Acts 11:26). They did not follow different creed books, but were guided by “the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).” This faith was spoken by holy men of God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19-21). We all have this inspired guide today in the New Testament.

We can reproduce pure Christianity today by following Jesus’ directions in the New Testament (Luke 8:11). The first four books of the New Testament are written, “that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31).” The fifth book, Acts of the Apostles, tells believers in Christ what they need to do to be saved (Acts 2:38-39; Acts 18:8; Acts 22:16). The next twenty-one books, Romans-Jude, tell how to live the Christian life. In the last book, The Revelation of John, Jesus told John, “Write therefore the things which you saw, the things which are, and the things which shall come to pass hereafter (Rev. 1:19).”

When you obey the command of Christ, God adds you to the nondenominational body, the church (Acts 2:47). You become a member of the church which Christ built (Mt. 16:18) and to which Peter, James, and John belonged.

Churches of Christ everywhere plead for the restoration of the church just as the New Testament described it. By restoring the name, organization, worship, and practice of the New Testament church, we can all be a part of that nondenominational body, as it existed in the first century (Col. 1:18). To restore involves stripping away the many layers of non-biblical teaching—as one would strip layers of paint off of a priceless antique—and getting to the true church as Jesus and his apostles and prophets described it in the New Testament.

The church that Jesus built (Mt. 16:18) in the first century can be a reality for all of us living in the twenty-first century.

When Does Faith Save?

The Bible teaches that one cannot be saved without genuine faith in Jesus as the Christ, the son of God (Heb. 11:6; John 20:30-31). Jesus said, “. . . for if you believe not that I am he, you will die in your sins (John 8:24).” But faith alone will not save, for Jesus said to some believers, “You are of your father the devil (John 8:30-31, 44).”

Furthermore, John writes, “Even of the rulers many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees, they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue (John 12:42).” The word *on* in this scripture is from the same word that is translated in or *on* in John 3:16. They believed on Jesus, but they were still lost, because they refused to confess Jesus. Paul wrote, “. . . with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:10).”

When does faith save us? The Bible gives a direct answer:

- One’s faith saves when that faith works through love (Gal.5:6).
- One’s faith saves when the person obeys the commands of God (1 John 5:3).
- One’s faith saves when there is an “obedience of faith.” Paul wrote of the “obedience of faith” at the beginning and at the end of the book of Romans (Rom. 1:5; Rom. 16:26-27).
- One’s faith saves when it has works. James wrote, “Even so, faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself (James 2:17).” James further explained, “You see that by works a man is justified and not only by faith (James 2:24).”
- One’s faith saves when it leads the person to obey the gospel (Rom. 6:16-18; Rom 6:1-5). The scriptures clearly state the steps to obeying the gospel. One must believe in Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 16:30-31). This faith must lead to personal repentance (Acts 2:38). The person must confess Christ with the mouth (Rom. 10:9-10). The person must be baptized unto the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21).
- Finally, faith saves when the person is “faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10).”
- When does faith save? When one completes his total obligation to God and His Son Jesus Christ. The New Testament (will) is a contract with no cancellation clause. One must obey it in all of its parts.

What about the Rapture?

Religious people often accept the doctrine of premillennialism. The doctrine teaches that when Jesus returns, he will establish His earthly kingdom and reign for 1,000 years in the city of Jerusalem.

One aspect of this theory is "the rapture". The theory states that immediately prior to the return of Christ to begin his thousand-year reign, he will immediately take his saints out of the world for a period of seven years. According to the theory, this seven-year period is "the rapture." While the saints are in heaven for these seven years, a great tribulation will fall upon the people who are left on earth. At the end of the seven-year period, Christ will return to the earth, establish his kingdom, and rule over this earthly kingdom.

Does the Bible teach this? An investigation will show that the word of God does not teach a single element of "the rapture" theory.

Proponents of this theory use 1 Thess. 4:14-18 as proof that the saints will "be caught away." But there is no mention of a seven year period. Nor is there a mention of "the rapture." The saints will be "caught up in the clouds," not for seven years but to "ever be with the Lord." When Paul wrote, "Even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him (1 Thess 4:14)," he was teaching the same thing that he taught in 1 Cor. 15:52, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." God will raise the dead in Christ and change the living, and all will ascend to meet the Lord when he comes. This passage speaks of the same final resurrection spoken of in 2 Thess. 1:5-10 and in 1 Cor. 15. After this coming of Christ, Paul writes, "Then comes the end (1 Cor. 15:24)." There will be no other resurrection.

Neither in 1 Thess. 4 nor elsewhere, does the Bible teach that there will be a either a secret or public rapture for seven years.

1 Thess. 4 shows that Christ will never actually put his feet upon the earth again. Paul says that he will come in the clouds and we will be caught up to ever be with the Lord.

There will be no earth from the time of the catching away of the saints because it will be burning up (2 Peter 3:12).

When Christ returns, instead of beginning his reign and establishing an earthy kingdom, he will end his reign and deliver up his Kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 23:26).

What about Christ's Thousand-Year Reign?

Many religious people believe that Jesus is coming soon to set up an earthy kingdom and reign on earth for a thousand years. What about it? Does the Bible teach and uphold this doctrine?

The theory is based on Revelation 20:6, which says, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him *a thousand years*." A close look at this passage shows that it says nothing about a reign of Christ on earth, over all people, in their bodies, and at the end of this age. There is absolutely nothing said in Rev. 20 or anywhere else in the scriptures about our Lord reigning a thousand years any time, any place.

An analysis of Rev. 20:6 shows the premillennial theory to be false. Look closely at the grammatical construction of Rev. 20:6. The main sentence is "They . . . shall reign with him a thousand years." To find the antecedent of the pronoun *they*, look at verse 4 and to the word *souls*. These were the people who had been beheaded because they were Christians. Clearly, this is the group who *shall reign* with Christ *a thousand years*. *They*, not *Christ*, is the subject of the verb *shall reign*, whose object is *a thousand years*.

It is important to see that *souls* were those who were to reign for a thousand years—not *Christ*. There is nothing said in Rev. 20 or anywhere else in the Bible about Christ reigning for a thousand years on this earth. Christ is reigning now over his kingdom.

Consider that Christ taught his kingdom was immediate and not something yet to come: "And he said to them, 'I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power (Mark 9:1).'" See also Mt 16:28. Christ also taught that his kingdom would not be of this world: "Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight (John 18:36).'"

Paul taught that we are now in his kingdom: "Who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love (Col. 1:13)." He further taught: "To the end that ye should walk worthily of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:12). John taught in the Revelation: "He made us *to be* a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father (Rev 1:6)."

A thousand-year reign of Christ on earth is not in the Bible.

Jesus Christ: Priest upon His Throne

Does the Bible teach that Jesus is yet to come to establish an earthly kingdom and reign over it in Jerusalem for a thousand years?

Zechariah, God's inspired spokesman, wrote about the work of the Messiah. In Zech. 6:12-13, through His prophet Zechariah God struck a deathblow to the doctrine of premillennialism. This doctrine holds that Christ is yet to come to reign over his kingdom on earth for the one thousand years. Zechariah wrote in Zech 6:12-13:

And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaks Jehovah of hosts, saying, Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: and he shall grow up out of his place; and he shall build the temple of Jehovah; even he shall build the temple of Jehovah; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.

Premillennialists teach that Christ functions as a priest now, as Heb. 4:15 clearly shows, but that he is not reigning as king now. They say that Christ will begin his reign as king when he returns. But Zechariah said, "*He shall be a priest upon his throne.*" At the same time Christ serves as high priest, he sits upon his throne. If Christ is high priest now, he is king now. If he is king now, his kingdom *exists now* here upon the earth and *now* in heaven.

God told Zechariah to place two crowns on the head of Joshua, the high priest (Zech. 6:10-11). Joshua, with the two crowns was a type of the Branch—the Christ. The two crowns represent the two positions filled by the true Branch. The two-tiered crown represents the simultaneous kingship and high priesthood of Christ.

The angel Gabriel spoke to Mary: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Luke 1:32-33)." Peter said God's prophecy was fulfilled when Christ was raised to sit on David's throne: ". . . God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins He would set (one) upon his [David's] throne . . . neither was he [Christ] left unto Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus did God raise up (Acts 2:29-33)."

Christ now sits on his throne and reigns over his kingdom into which God translates we who are his (Col. 1:13).

The New Testament Church

Many have trouble with the concept of nondenominational Christianity. The Bible teaches that being a simple New Testament Christian is what God wants. The scriptures show very clearly how this is possible.

Jesus said in Luke 8:11 that “the seed is the word of God.” The Bible and our own experience teach that seed always brings forth after its kind (Gen. 1:11-14). If corn seed produces the same thing year after year, it is logical to conclude that the word of God produces the same thing year after year. Seed left in the Egyptian pyramids for thousands of years, reproduces after its kind, when planted in our time. After two thousand years, God’s seed, his word, will bring forth after its kind. The result will be the New Testament church made up of New Testament Christians.

Acts 2 tells about the establishment of the church. The apostles planted the spiritual seed, the word, in good and honest hearts, and this produced faith (Acts 2:37; Rom. 10:17). When the people asked, “What must we do?,” what did the apostles tell these believers to do to be saved? “And Peter (said) unto them, ‘Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).’” Then the Lord added these people to his church (Act 2:41, 47).

Before Acts 2, the Bible speaks of the church in the future. After Acts 2, the Bible speaks of the church as being in existence, and the scriptures referring to the kingdom are always in the past tense.

Today, when people do exactly what the people in Acts 2 did, they will added to the Lord’s church, the same church that came into being on that memorable day 2,000 years ago. Today, if we preach the same gospel, if good and honest hearts receive it by faith, if the hearers repent and are baptized unto the remission of sins, they will be added to the New Testament church and be New Testament Christians, just as those people in Acts 2 were. All of these, then and now, wear the same name, worship in the same manner, serve the one true and living God and Savior, and enjoy the same great hope of eternal life.

The gospel is God’s power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). Obey this gospel, which is his will, and he will add you to his church (Acts2:47). You will be a New Testament Christian and a member of the New Testament church. God’s seed, his word, will always bring forth after its kind.

Tongue Speaking: What Does the Bible Say?

Many religious groups claim to speak in tongues. They describe their movement with the terms *glossolalia* and *charismatic*. Members of many churches have claimed the gift of tongue speaking. Do people speak in tongues in the Biblical way in the present world?

The New Testament gives examples of people who spoke in tongues in Acts 2:1-4; Mk. 16:17-20; Acts 10:44-48; Acts 19:1-7; 1 Cor. 12:30. The gift of tongues is one of the spiritual gifts possessed by the early church and listed in 1 Cor. 12:4-11. The *glossolalia*, as it is now called, was not ecstatic speech, but was the ability to speak in foreign languages understood by those who listened. 1 Cor. 14:22-27; Acts 2:6.

The ability to speak in tongues (understandable languages) or foreign languages was a gift possessed by the church in the first century. The church of today does not possess this gift. The Bible tells of three principles that make it impossible for people of today to have the power to speak in tongues.

First, there is no Holy Spirit baptism given today. God promised in Joel 2:28 to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. In the Bible sense, there are two kinds of flesh, Jew and Gentile. The promise was fulfilled to the Jews in Acts 2 and to the Gentiles in Acts 10. In Acts 10:47, Peter took special notice of just how unique this happening was when he said, "Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?"

Second, there is no speaking in tongues today because there are no apostles to lay hands on people. Only the apostles by the laying on of their hands had the power to impart spiritual gifts. This truth is clearly set forward in Acts 8:4-17. When the last apostle died, so did the power to pass on spiritual gifts, including the speaking in tongues.

Third, Paul said the miraculous gifts would cease when the New Testament was completed (1 Cor. 13:8-10). God gave spiritual gifts for a period when the church was young, and God's revelation to man was not yet complete. These gifts were to help his infant church. Paul summarized this teaching in 1 Cor 13:9-10: "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away." When that which was perfect, the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25), was come, the miraculous gifts were no longer needed.

People today do not speak in tongues in the Biblical way.

Do Signs and Miracles Exist Today?

Some religious groups teach that God promised the miraculous signs listed in Mark 16:17-18 to all believers in the Christian age.

A close look at the passages in Mark 16 shows that the plural pronouns *them* and *they* of verses 17 and 18 have as their antecedents the plural pronouns *they* and *them* of verses 14 and 15. The reference is to the eleven apostles and not to the singular *he* of verse 16. If this is not true, then why is the number of the pronoun different in verse 16. The entire conversation of the passage concerns the apostles and their unique mission for the Lord:

The *them* of verse 17 are the apostles to whom Christ appeared in verse 14 and upbraided for the lack of their faith. The expression *them that believe* continues to remind them their faith needs to grow.

The *them* of verse 17 is the *them* of verse 19 in whose sight the Lord Jesus was received up into heaven.

The *them* of verse 17 are the *they* who went forth in verse 20 “and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs that followed.” Heb 2:2-4 teaches that the signs that accompanied the apostles confirmed the word.

The *them* of verse 17 are the *them* to whom the baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised in Mt. 3:11 and Acts 1:2-5. The *them* of verse 17 are the ones to whom the Lord promised the Comforter to guide them into all truth (John 14:25-26; 16:13).

The *them* of verse 17 are the ones who were baptized in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:26; 2:1-4).

The Lord’s promise was that the signs of Mk 16:17 would follow the apostles, and the purpose of the signs was to confirm the word which they preached and wrote (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4). Only the apostles and the ones upon whom they laid their hands could perform these signs (Acts 8:18). Where the apostles did not go, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were not imparted (Acts 8:18; Rom. 1:11; 2 Cor. 12:12). After the death of the apostles and those upon whom they had laid their hands, miraculous gifts stopped.

Paul lists the miraculous gifts in 1 Cor 12:7-10. In 1 Cor. 13:8-13, he says these would cease with the coming of “that which is perfect (1 Cor. 13:10).” “That which is perfect” refers to the completed will of Christ, the New Testament scriptures. Miraculous gifts had served their purpose and vanished from the earth.

How Does God Draw People Today?

Does the Bible state clearly how God draws lost people to Him in order that He can save them? Jesus declared in John 6:44, "No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him." In the next verse, John 6:45, Jesus explains how the drawing takes place: "It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that has heard from the Father, and has learned, comes unto me."

God does not send a direct or miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of alien sinners to convert them. The Holy Spirit uses his sword, which is the word of God (Eph. 6:17). With this sword, the word of God, the Spirit convicts and converts lost sinners.

Conviction: "And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye behold me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged (John 16:8-11)."

Conversion: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified. Now when they heard (this,) they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter (said) unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:36-38)."

Paul shows in 2 Thess. 2:13-14 that Christ calls people through the gospel: "For that God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: 14 whereunto he called you through our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." In Rom. 10:17, he taught that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Therefore Christ calls people through the "word of truth, the gospel of your salvation (Eph. 1:13)."

We must allow God to draw us by teaching us; and then we must obey His gospel. Severe consequences result from not obeying God. "And to you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, (even) eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

Baptism and Sons of God

Baptism, being sons of God, and putting on Christ are inseparable. Gal. 3:26-27 states these relationships in beautiful terms: "For you are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ." This passage teaches in a clear way that we must be baptized to be a son of God and to put on Christ.

There is a causal connection between verses 26 and 27, between being a son of God and being baptized. Verse 27 begins with the word *For*, and shows the cause or gives the reason for the preceding statement. Being baptized into Christ causes us to be sons of God.

There is also a change in the tense of the verbs in verses 26 and 27. The *are* in "You are all sons of God" in verse 26 is a present tense verb. Verse 27, uses a past tense verb, *were baptized*. Saying that they were baptized into Christ at some former time shows that baptism preceded their being sons of God at the time Paul was writing the letter to them. In the meaning of the passage, if they had not been baptized, they would not have been sons of God. Without the cause, *baptized into Christ*, there cannot be the effect, *being sons of God*.

In verse 27, Paul uses the preposition *into* in the expression "baptized into Christ." This preposition suggests that something on the outside needs to come into something. In this case, those outside need to come into Christ. Paul teaches that this movement from the outside of Christ into Christ is through baptism: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ (Gal 3:27).

Once we are in Christ, we are sons of God, receiving the blessings of God, including salvation. Peter teaches, "And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved (Acts 4:12)." As His sons, God "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly (places) in Christ (Eph. 1:3)." We are God's sons, we are saved, and we have every spiritual blessing in Christ, because of our baptism into Christ.

It is important to be baptized according to the purpose given in the Bible. Not only are we baptized into Christ, but we are baptized unto the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). We are baptized to wash away our sins (Acts 22:16). We are baptized into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3-5). All God's blessings flow to His children because of their baptism into Christ, as taught in Gal. 3:26-27.

Predictive Prophecy

The presence of prophecy and its fulfillment is a powerful proof of the inspiration of the Bible. Peter tells how prophets predicted the future. "For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21)."

One scholar has written that the Old Testament contains 333 prophecies dealing with the coming of Christ. Not only did God's spokesmen tell about the Messiah, but they also made predictions about events that were to take place in the various nations. Isaiah accurately predicted the fate of Babylon (Isa. 13). Ezekiel gave an account of the destruction of Tyre (Ez. 26). There are many other cases, but these show that men of old possessed this power of God.

It is common for someone to predict when the world will end or when some other event connected to the Bible will occur. Christ said in Mt 24:25-26: "Behold, I have told you beforehand. If therefore they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the wilderness; go not forth: Behold, he is in the inner chambers; believe (it) not." God gives a standard by which we can judge all predictions of the future: "When a prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which Jehovah has not spoken (Deut. 18:22)."

The New Testament makes very plain that no one knows when the end of the world will come except the Father. In Matt 24:36, the Lord said, "But of that day and hour knows no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only." The day of the Lord will bring with it the complete destruction of the world and all that is in it. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up (2 Peter 3:10)."

The Bible foretells the end of prophecy. In 1 Cor.13, the apostle Paul said, "But whether *there be* prophecies, they shall be done away; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall be done away (1 Cor 13:8)". This will all happen when that which is perfect is come: "But when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away (1 Cor. 13:10)." That which is perfect is the "perfect law, the law of liberty" revealed through the inspired writers of the New Testament. See James 1:25.

No man today can predict the future by prophecy from God.

A Plea for Christ

Churches of Christ plead for the restoration of the apostolic church. This means a return to the original ground of the New Testament church. One must go back beyond all human creeds, councils, synods, and ecclesiastical authorities to the very teaching of Christ and his apostles. There one will find the original church of Christ in its true faith, worship, and practice. This plea involves seven principles:

1. *It is a plea for the name of Christ.* Salvation is in the name of Christ (Luke 24:47; Acts 4:12). Christians are those who wear Christ's name and live as he directs (Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16).
2. *It is a plea for the divinity of Christ.* Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God. This truth was the central teaching of the apostles (Acts 2; Acts 8:36-39).
3. *It is a plea for the word of Christ.* We must reject all human creeds as incomplete and, in many cases, erroneous. The word of Christ is sufficient to meet all our spiritual needs (2 Tim. 16:17).
4. *It is a plea for the authority of Christ* (Mt. 28:18-20). The will of Christ is in the New Testament (covenant or will), and no one has the right to change it. We must base all of our beliefs and practices on his truth as revealed in his word. The Holy Spirit revealed all truth to the apostles, and this constitutes the complete spiritual guide for all time (John 14:16-16,26; John 16:13; Rev. 22:18-19).
5. *It is a plea for the church of Christ.* Christ bought his church with his blood (Acts 20:28). God adds to the church those that are saved (Acts 2:47). Salvation belongs to those who believe, repent, confess, and are baptized unto the remission of sins (Rom. 10:17; John 8:24; Lk 13:3; Rom. 10:10; Acts 2:38).
6. *It is a plea for unity in Christ.* The church was united in the first century and should be united today (John 17:20-21; Eph. 4:1-6).
7. *It is a plea for dedication and godly living in Christ* (Mt. 5:1-16; Phil. 2:15).

Only by following the truth can we create the true church in this present time. Peter admonished, "If any man speaks, *speaking* as it were oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11)." By replicating what is in the oracles of God, we can restore the apostolic church in the twenty-first century.

The Blood of Christ

The Bible teaches clearly that salvation from sin is possible because Jesus shed his blood in our behalf. It was Jesus who “loosed us from our sins by his blood (Rev 1:5).” John saw a vision of the redeemed who had “washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14).” Paul declared that we have “redemption through his blood (Eph. 1:7).” Peter taught, “You were redeemed . . . with precious blood, as of a lamb without spot, *even the blood of Christ* (Peter 1:18).”

If we have redemption through his blood, the sinner’s soul must come into contact with the cleansing power of the blood. When does one experience this cleansing power? When is the blood of Christ applied to the soul of the alien sinner? Does the Bible indicate a definite time and place when the Father “delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love (Col 1:13).”

In Rom. 6:3-4, the Bible shows precisely when this takes place:

Or are you ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him through baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.

Christ shed his blood for the remission of our sins (Mt. 26:28). He shed his blood in his death (John 19:34). We are baptized into his death (Rom. 6:3). The penitent believer experiences the cleansing power of the blood when he is baptized into Jesus’ death (Rom. 6:3) and raised to walk in newness of life (Rom.6:4).

The Bible teaches that one is baptized into Christ, “For you are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ (Gal 3:26-27).” Since one is not in Christ before baptism, neither is he where the redemptive blood of Christ is. Paul teaches in Eph 1:7, “In whom we have our redemption through his blood.” Peter shows that the obedience to the truth purifies us: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently (1 Peter 1:22).”

Have you come in contact with the blood of Christ and experienced its marvelous cleansing power? Have you been washed in the blood of the Lamb?

Saved by Grace

The Bible teaches that salvation is by God's grace. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God (Eph 2:8)." Does salvation exclude any effort, activity, or obedience on our part? Has God made salvation conditional or unconditional? The Bible answers these questions.

The Bible teaches that salvation is a gift, but it is a conditional gift. Our faith must express itself in our obedience before we receive God's blessings (Rom. 1:5; 16:26; 6:16-18; 6:1-5; Mk 16:15-16). A number of Bible examples illustrate this point.

Naaman (2 Kings 5). Naaman had leprosy, an incurable disease. There was no way that he could cure himself. He visited the prophet Elisha who told him to go and dip seven times in the Jordan river. This infuriated Naamen, but he eventually obeyed and was cleansed. God promised to bestow this blessing when Naamen met certain conditions. Did Naamen earn this blessing? Certainly not. But he had to dip seven times in the Jordan River to receive it.

Jericho (Joshua 6). God told Joshua in Josh. 6:2: "And the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and the valiant warriors (Josh 6:2-3)." However, Joshua and the Israelites had to meet certain conditions before they could receive this gift. The men of war had to march around the walls of Jericho one time each day for six days and seven times on the seventh day. The story shows that at least 16 acts of obedience were required before God gave them the city.

Today. Christ offers the people of today salvation. Yet, there are specific conditions which we must meet before we can receive this gift. Salvation is a gift of God that no man can earn. Yes, it is a gift of God, "Not as a result of works, that no one should boast (Eph. 2:9)." However, just as Naamen and just as Joshua, we must do what God tells us to receive his gift: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Eph 2: 10)."

What has God told us to do to receive this gift of grace? He told us that we must believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God (Acts 16:31). He told us to repent of our sins (Luke 13:3). He told us to confess our faith in the Lord (Rom.10:10). He told us to be baptized unto the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38). Finally, he told us, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life (Rev. 2:10)."

A New Beginning

Life is full of new beginnings. Each child is born to a new beginning. Each marriage is a new beginning. Each New Year is a new beginning with new purposes and new resolutions. Jesus Christ holds out to everyone the offer of a new life through the forgiveness of sins and fellowship with him. Do you need a new beginning?

Christianity is the revelation of God through Jesus Christ that makes possible a new spiritual life. Paul spoke of this in 2 Cor. 5:17, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature." What must we do to be a new creature? The Bible answers this question so clearly that no one should misunderstand.

Becoming a new creature requires a new birth. Jesus said, "I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5)." Jesus spoke of both the water and the Spirit having a part in the new birth. Paul describes the part of water in the new birth, "We were buried therefore with him through baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4-5)." Peter spoke to the part of the Spirit in the new birth, "For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God (1 Peter 1:23)." It is this abiding word of God that is the sword of the Spirit. "And take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph 6:17)." The Spirit is present in the new birth though God's word.

Becoming a new creature requires being in Christ. Paul said, "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, *he is* a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new (2 Cor 5:17)." How does a penitent believer enter into Christ? Again in Rom. 6:3, Paul said, "Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" The result of this baptism in Christ is that we "might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4)." A person cannot be a new creature without being in Christ, and Paul says in Gal. 3:27 that one is baptized into Christ: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ."

Baptism, the final act of obedience, generates the new birth, the end of which leaves us new creatures walking in newness of life. Peter describes this condition, "Which also after a true likeness doth now save you, *even* baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Will you not seize this new beginning?

Come Back to God

Did you at one time attend Bible school, read the Bible, pray, and try to serve God? Did you trust in God and believe that He cared for you? Did you, along the way, allow the cares of this world to crowd God out like weed-choked seed in the parable of the sower? "And he that was sown among the thorns, this is he that hears the word; and the care of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he become unfruitful (Matt 13:22)."

Now that you are no longer trying to serve God, do you feel a great void in your life? Do you miss the strength, the power, and the contentment that comes from a daily walk with Jesus? We all need the spiritual power that comes to those who walk with the Lord. "If God is for us, who is against us? Paul wrote and concluded, "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:31, 38, 39)."

In our absence in service to Christ, we also fail to teach our children about God and plant His word in their hearts. Paul instructed fathers, "You fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4)."

Everyone is a free moral agent, endowed with the power of choice, and responsible to God (Ezek. 18:19-24; 2 Cor. 2:10). Coming back to God is where one will find peace, strength, and forgiveness (Phil. 4:6-7; Rom. 8:31-39). Coming back to God gives hope beyond the grave (Eph.1:3-7; Rev. 20:12-15).

If you decide to come back to God, come all the way back. When the wise men came to Bethlehem seeking Jesus, they were not satisfied until they found him (Mt. 2:1-12). They did not rest until they came all the way. You should not be satisfied until you have returned all the way to God and His word. Studying the scriptures and having an open heart is essential (2 Tim. 2:15; John 5:39-40). The Lord has promised to help the sincere seeker of the truth (John 7:17; 8:32).

Coming back to Christ, means coming back to his church (Mt. 16:18; Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:22-30). Coming back to Christ includes acceptance of Christ and obedience to his gospel (Mk. 16:15-16; Rom. 6:16-18). Coming back to Christ requires the faithful living of the Lord's way of life, which is the Christian life (Col. 3; Rev.2:10). Find strength, power, and contentment; come back to Jesus.

Facts about the New Testament Church

During his personal ministry, Jesus promised to build his church (Mt. 16:13-19). A detailed account of the fulfillment of this promise is in the Bible. The New Testament reveals these specific points and facts of faith and practice, which are important to everyone desiring to please the Lord.

1. Penitent believers were baptized for the remission of sins and the Lord added them to the church (Acts 2:37-38, 47). There is no example of anyone being voted into the church.
2. The church was not a denomination. The Bible never uses this word in relation to the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:1-2; Rom. 16:16).
3. Christ's followers wore the name *Christian* (Acts 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:16). Denominational names came centuries later.
4. The church was governed by the word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 John 9). The New Testament church did not use creed books or catechisms.
5. The church worshipped on every first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2; Heb. 10:25).
6. The church observed the Lord's Supper (communion) on every first day of the week (Acts 20:7).
7. The church used vocal music in worship (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).
8. The church gave their financial resources on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2). There is no authority to use other means to raise money; such as raffles, suppers, etc.
9. The church called preachers evangelists or ministers (2 Tim. 4:5; Eph. 4:12; 1 Thess. 3:1-2; Eph. 6:21). They did not call preachers pastor or give them the title of reverend (Mt. 25:5-11).
10. The early church had overseers, also called pastors and elders, in every congregation (Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-7).
11. Each congregation had deacons to serve the congregation (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim 3:12-13; Phil. 1:1).

Paul taught that "You might learn not *to go* beyond the things which are written (1 Cor 4:6)." He pronounces serious judgment on those who do: "If any man preaches unto you any gospel other than that which you received, let him be anathema (Gal 1:9)."

The Saving Power of the Truth

When the Lord was on trial, Pilate asked him, "What is truth (John 18:36)?" It would be difficult to find a more important question. Jesus answered the question in John 17:17: "Sanctify them in truth: your word is truth." This same truth, the word of God, makes one free. Jesus said, "If you abide in my word, *then* are you truly my disciples; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:31-32)."

The Bible not only teaches that the truth is the word of God but it is the gospel, which saves us. Paul wrote in Rom.1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." In view of this, consider these points:

First, we become Christians through the power of the word of God: "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures (James 1:18). Obedience of the truth also purifies the soul. Peter said, "Seeing you have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently (Peter 1:22)." Paul declared that the gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor.15:1-2). One is not saved by what one thinks is right nor by the doctrines and opinions of men. The gospel, which is the word of God, the truth, saves.

Second, we grow as Christians through the power of the word of God. The word of God provides spiritual nourishment. Peter admonishes, "As newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto salvation (1 Peter 2:2)." God's word builds up and gives an eternal inheritance (Acts 20:32). The scriptures furnish the man of God unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Third, we overcome temptation by the power of God's word. (Psa. 119:11, 165; Mt. 4:7-10).

Fourth, the basis for God's judgment will be His word (John 12:48; Rev. 20:12). Feelings, opinion, and theological thought and writings will not judge us. It is urgent to find and obey the truth.

Fifth, error will condemn the soul when substituted for the word of God. Paul warns about the danger of believing a lie (2 Thess. 2:10-12). We must search the scriptures to find the truth and obey it as the word of God, the gospel of our salvation (Eph. 1:13).

The Saved Are in the Church

The apostle Paul declared in Eph. 5:23, “For the husband is the head of the wife, and Christ also is the head of the church, *being* himself the saviour of the body.” Everyone needs to understand this aspect of the church. Paul states several important truths.

First, Jesus Christ is our saviour (Mt 1:21; John 1:29; Luke 19:10). Christ saves us from the guilt, the practice, and the condemnation of sin (Heb. 9:22; Rom. 8:10; 1 Pet. 2:21).

Second, salvation is in Christ. The apostle Peter said, “And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved (Acts 4:12).” John wrote, “that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life (John 3:15).” Paul said, “Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (2 Tim 2:10).” Peter, John, and Paul agree as one that salvation is in Christ. They all use the preposition *in* giving the specific location of salvation. If salvation is in Christ, the important question is how do we get *in* Christ? Two passages deal simply and specifically with this point, Rom. 6:3-4 and Gal. 6:23-24. These show clearly and conclusively that one is baptized into Christ. Those in Christ are saved; the saved are those in Christ.

Third, the saved are in his body, the church. Paul wrote, “Christ also is the head of the church, *being* himself the saviour of the body (Eph 5:23).” Christ, then, is saviour of the body and the body is the church. That the body and the church are one and the same is clearly taught: “He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all (Eph 1:22-23).” All the saved are in his body, the church. His body, the church are all the saved. How do we get into to the church, the body of the saved? Paul answers this question in a most direct way, “For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).”

The clear Bible teaching is that the saved are in the church and the saved are in Christ. We cannot find salvation outside Christ or outside his body, the church. The same baptism that puts us in Christ also put us in his body, the church. The inclusive steps to obedience—faith, repentance, confession, and baptism—culminate with the Lord adding the saved to his church: “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47-3:1 KJV).”

The Church the Bride of Christ

The New Testament uses many figures of speech in its teaching about the church. By comparing the church to things that we already know about, the Bible makes known the significance and importance of the church. In Eph. 5:22-32, Paul compares the relationship of a husband and wife to the relationship between Christ and the church. This passage emphasizes several important truths.

First, Christians are married to Christ. When we become dead to the law of sin and death, we are joined to (marry) Christ. "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ; that ye should be joined to [marry, KJV] another, (even) to him who was raised from the dead (Rom 7:4)."

Second, as a husband, Christ loved the church. Using the example of husband and wives, Paul wrote,

Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious *church*, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

Third, as the husband, Christ is head over the church. "For the husband is the head of the wife, and Christ also is the head of the church, *being* himself the saviour of the body (Eph 5:23)."

Fourth, the church is subject to Christ, the head. "Wives, (be in subjection) unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. But as the church is subject to Christ, so (let) the wives also (be) to their husbands in everything (Eph. 5:24)."

Fifth, Christ and the church join as one. ". . . Because we are members of his body. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church (Eph. 5:30-32)."

Sixth, the bride of Christ is the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city. "I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven of God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2).

Finally, as one, Christ and the church act together to call us home: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev 22:17)."

One Baptism into One Body

The apostle Paul makes an important statement about the significance of baptism in 1 Cor. 12:13: "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks." This scripture speaks about the church and its unity.

Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would work through the apostles and prophets and the word he spoke and wrote: "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, *these* shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come (John 16:13)." The Holy Spirit acts through the word of God, which Paul calls the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). The word of God instructs the lost to be baptized in water for the remission of sins (1 Pet. 3:21; Acts 22:16; Acts 2:38). It is according to the Spirit's word that we are baptized into one body.

The 1 Cor 12:13, the preposition *in* (translated *by* in the KJV) expresses agency and instrumentality: "*en* a primary preposition denoting position (in place, time or state), and (by implication) instrumentality (Strong)." It is by the evidence and teaching, provided by the Holy Spirit, through the apostles and prophets, that people are to believe (Mk. 16:15), repent (Lk. 13:3), confess faith in Christ (Rom. 10:10), and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

Baptized, in 1 Cor.12:13, does not refer to Holy Spirit baptism. For according to Paul in Eph. 4:5, there is only one baptism. Paul was practicing and teaching baptism in water when he wrote both Ephesians and 1 Corinthians. Holy Spirit baptism, recorded only in Acts 2 and Acts 10, went to the apostles on the Day of Pentecost and to the house of Cornelius. Holy Spirit baptism had ceased when he wrote that there is one baptism.

The baptism of 1 Cor. 12:13 applies to everyone. Paul said, "Were we all baptized. . . "He did not say that some by one spirit are baptized into one body; he said that we all were. Those of today, who claim Holy Spirit baptism, do not believe everyone receives it. The baptism, by water, in the one spirit, of 1 Cor. 12:13, puts one into the one body, the church. It also puts one into Christ (Gal. 3:27) and the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3:6), where the blood of Christ cleanses all sin.

Fellow traveler to eternity, have you obeyed the teaching of the Holy Spirit which instructs all to be baptized unto the remission of sins and into the one body, the true church of the Lord?

Religious Truth: Where Is It Found?

People who want to go to heaven are interested in the truth and where they can find it. How can we know assuredly that we have found the truth? God has not left us in doubt about this question.

First, the scriptures contain all religious truth. Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would “guide them into all truth John 16:13.” The evident conclusion is that after the apostles, no truth remained unrevealed. After the apostles, no human received a revelation of truth; and neither man nor church developed any new truths.

Second, only miraculously inspired people could make known revelations from God. The apostles and Cornelius and his house were the only people who were baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4; Acts 10: 44-48; 11:16-17; 1 Cor. 12:12-13). The apostles could lay hands on certain people and impart unto them a miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-18). Once the last person died who had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and once the last person died upon whom apostles laid hands, no miraculous revelations have occurred. No one today receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:5).

Third, God revealed through the inspired men (apostles and prophets) a complete and perfect guide. In 2 Tim. 3:16-17, Paul wrote, “Every scripture inspired of God (is) also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.” Every religious belief and practice, inspired of God, is in the Bible.

Fourth, claims, made by some, of new and additional revelations, are false. If any man preaches a gospel not preached by Paul and the inspired writers, he is accursed.

But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema. As we have said before, so say I now again, if any man preaches unto you any gospel other than that which you received, let him be anathema (Gal 1:8-9).

Jude wrote that the faith was “once for all delivered to the saints (Jude).” One has observed that if a doctrine is new, it is not true; and if a doctrine is true, it is not new.

Where is religious truth found? In the Bible, God’s word, and there alone.

God's Law of Reproduction

A study of God's natural law gives a better understanding of His spiritual laws. The laws of nature show the greatness of God and the certainty of His holy word (Psalms 19:1-7).

God has enacted and fixed His laws for man's own good. Included in these laws, are the laws of nature. Man receives great benefit when he uses the laws of nature properly: "But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully (1 Tim 1:8)." If man breaks god's immutable natural laws, they can destroy him.

For an example, consider the laws of gravity. Without this law, chaos would reign in the universe. One could not even place an object on a table, for it would have no weight. If God were to repeal this law, we would all go flying off in space. Therefore, this wonderful law, if defied, can bring destruction. If one were to jump off of a twenty-story building, God would not repeal His law to save him.

The farmer understands the operation of God's law when he plants seed. God makes the statement: "Each brought forth after its kind" ten times in Genesis 1. When the farmer plants corn seed, he know that the seed will produce corn and corn alone.

We must realize that God also has spiritual laws that govern spiritual reproduction and growth. These laws are plainly stated, easily recognized, require obedience, and never change. (Jude 3; Rev. 22:18-19; Luke 8).

Jesus declared in Luke 8:1 that the seed is the word of God. When this seed, the word of God, is planted today in good and honest hearts, it produces Christians, just like those it did in the first century (Acts 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:15). God's word, planted today, will yield Christian. To produce something other than Christians, something other than the true word of God must be planted.

God's spiritual laws are as unchangeable as God's natural laws. The divine law of pardon has been the same throughout the Christian age. To become Christians, all must believe (Mark 16:15-16), repent (Luke 13.3), confess (Rom. 10:9-10), and be baptized unto the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). All who follow these steps will become Christians, in accord with God's divine law of spiritual reproduction.

God will add all who follow this divine law of spiritual reproduction to His heavenly kingdom (John 3:3-5) to His church (Acts 2:47 and to His household (2 Tim. 3:15).

Doing God's Will Is Important

The desire for cars, houses, and material things consumes many people. Entrapped and entrenched by our desires, we see doing God's will as relatively unimportant. Why should we be concerned about God's will?

First, God's will is important. Sometimes even the apostle Peter questioned its value. On one occasion, Peter asked Jesus if doing God's will was worth giving up such things as family, home, and career. "What then shall we have (Matt. 19:27)?" The Lord's answer was direct, practical, and powerful. "And every one that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life (Matt 19:29)." God will richly reward them that do His will and follow His son.

Second, God's blessings to those who obey His will are many and wonderful. There is the great joy of knowing that God forgives our sins (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 8:36-39). The doer of God's will enjoys the fellowship with God and with His people (1 John 1:7). The Christian heritage includes the peace of mind which comes from knowing that our sins are forgiven, from having a good conscience, and from living daily in God's favor and under His care (Matt. 5:1-12; Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Peter 3:21). God's greatest blessing is eternal life to those who obey His will (Titus 1:2; Heb. 11:9-10).

Third, God tells us clearly in the Bible what we must do to obey His will. We must love God supremely (Mark 12:28-31), place God first (Luke 14:26-33), and obey God's will (Matt. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9). In order to obey His will, we must begin with His instructions to believe (John 8:24), repent (Acts 16:30-31), confess (Matt. 10:32-33), be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), and faithfully live the Christian life (Titus 2:11-14).

Fourth, God adds those who do His will to the church day by day. These are the saved (Acts 2:47). The church is God's family (1 Tim. 3:15). God also translates the saved into the kingdom of the son of His love (Col. 1:12). God grants his blessing to us in the church, the family, the Kingdom.

Finally, God expects that we act urgently in obeying His will. "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2)." "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation (Heb. 2:3)?"

An Objective Standard Is Important

We all spend much time watching television and movies. These media often portray moral and ethical situations, questions, and problems. One character must decide, "Shall I be sexually immoral?" Other characters face other moral dilemmas, "Shall I rob the bank?" Or, "Shall I lie?"

These media portrayals often leave the impression that each person must decide what is right or wrong in the light of his or her particular circumstances. Many times, a situational ethic is applied. What gives one pleasure now, or what is most beneficial now, overrides any objective standard of truth.

Many people believe that we, each one, create our own truth, and that there is no definite divine truth. In many subtle ways, the media present the idea that there is no such thing as an objective divine standard by which God measures all of our acts. Some even contend that the only legitimate and right answers are human answers.

The idea that each one decides what is moral and ethical avoids answering many Biblical questions. How does one decide what to believe and practice in religion? How does one decide what religious name to wear? How does one determine the necessity and purpose of baptism? Must one be a member of Christ's church? How should one worship? Are these questions and others like them to be answered by human judgment and opinion?

Human wisdom cannot provide answers to the pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father (James 1:27). Jeremiah stated, "I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps (Jer. 10:23)." If religious standards are not in man, where are they? There is a definite, objective body of divine truth, obedience to which will result in the salvation of the soul (1 Peter 1:22-23). The truth is the Bible, the inspired word of the eternal God (2 Tim.3:16). This truth has the power to save and make one free from all sin (Rom.1:16;John 8:32).

God's truth does not change. His truth is just as relevant today as it was when He delivered it. If we depend upon human opinion, materialistic philosophies, or skeptical theories, such as agnosticism or atheism, we will walk down life's pathway uncertain and confused. God's word is the authoritative and objective guide in all things that pertain to spiritual life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3-4). Let us remember in all of life's situations: "It is not in man that walks to direct his steps."

A Return to the Bible

One of mankind's greatest needs is to return to the Bible and let its precepts govern. God said through Jeremiah: "Thus says Jehovah, 'Stand you in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein, and you shall find rest for your souls (Jer 6:16).'" The Bible is God's inspired word and guides us in the way of truth (2 Tim. 3:16). The apostle Paul said, "So belief *comes* of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ (Rom 10:17)." We must appeal to God's word to settle every religious question.

Each individual must engage in a personal study of the scriptures (2 Tim. 2:15). We should not look at the Bible through theological glasses fitted by human creed books and fallible religious teachers. We must forget creeds, traditions, and dogmas, which come from man; and we must study the Bible as God's own message to us. Each should determine to walk by that faith which comes from hearing God's word. Let's see how we can return to God's word, the Bible.

First, returning to the Bible involves accepting the Bible as final authority in religion (1 Cor. 4:6; Rev. 22:18-19). We cannot determine religious truth by what we feel, by what the preacher says, by our opinions, or by what our parents believe. Jesus said that God's "word is truth (John 17:17)." The Bible, God's word, must settle all issues.

Second, returning to the Bible involves accepting the Bible teaching concerning the church. Jesus established his church (Matt. 16:16-18) and adds all saved people to it (Acts 2:47). A return to the Bible requires us to accept the Bible teaching on the name of the church, the purpose of the church, the organization of the church, and the worship of the church. The church of the Bible was the church of Christ: "The churches of Christ salute you (Rom. 16:16)." In the church, we are to follow the Bible pattern. Paul told Timothy, "Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me (2 Tim 1:13)." Returning to the Bible means going back to the church as it is in the Bible.

Third, going back to the Bible involves going back to the Bible plan of salvation. We must become "obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto you were delivered (Rom 6:17)." The Bible plan of salvation commands us to believe (John 8:24), turn away from sin and turn to Christ (Acts 17:30-31), confess Christ (Matt 10:32-33), and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16).

Our plea is that we all return to the Bible and obey its teaching.

The Significance of the Gospel

The New Testament uses the term *gospel* frequently. We all need to have a clear understanding of its meaning and significance.

First, Jesus commanded his disciples to preach the gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15). These disciples were so faithful in carrying out the commission of the Lord that Paul could say that the gospel “was preached in all creation under heaven (Col 1:23).”

Second, the gospel of Christ is the word of reconciliation;

But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation. . . . We beseech (you) on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:18-20).

According to Paul, God committed this word of reconciliation to faithful teachers (See 2 Tim. 2:2).

Third, the gospel of Christ is “the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).” The Corinthians experienced firsthand this power of God: “Now I make known unto you brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye hold fast the word which I preached unto you, except ye believed in vain (1 Cor 15:1-2).” Paul preached the gospel to the Corinthians, they received and obeyed it, and the gospel saved them. Acts 18:8 affirms the power of the gospel among the Corinthians: “The Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”

Fourth, the gospel calls sinners. Paul explained this fact about the gospel: “Whereunto he called you through our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:14).” The Holy Spirit does not call the lost by his direct operation or intervention. An emotional experience or feeling does not call the lost. One cannot be called at the mourners’ bench. The lost are called by the gospel when they hear and obey it (Mark 16:15-16; 2 Thess. 1:7-9).

Fourth, the gospel calls those who receive and obey it. The gospel called and saved the Christians at Rome when they received it and obeyed it from the heart: “But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness (Rom 6:17-18).”

Grace and Obedience

Many religious people err in their understanding of the relation between grace and obedience. This problem causes good and sincere individuals to hold inconsistent beliefs. An unbiased look at the scriptures will resolve this difficulty.

First, the Bible teaches that salvation is by grace but not by grace alone (Eph. 2:8; Matt. 7:21). If salvation be by grace alone, then faith, repentance, the love of God, and the blood of Christ are unnecessary. Yet the Bible implicitly teaches that without faith (Heb. 11:6) and repentance (Luke 13:3) there is no salvation.

Second, salvation by grace does not exclude obedience. God told Joshua in Josh. 6:2: "See I have given unto your hand Jericho." Did Joshua receive it unconditionally? Before God gave them Jericho, the Israelites had to march around the walls for six days, and seven times on the seventh day (Josh. 6:1-11). Naaman was told to dip seven times in the Jordan river before being cleansed of leprosy (1 Kings 5). His cleansing was a gift of God, but he did not receive it until he met God's conditions. If the Israelites with Joshua and Naaman had refused to obey God, would they have received God's grace?

Third, according to Titus 2:11-12, the grace of God has appeared to all men. If salvation is by grace alone, then God's grace will save all, because God's grace has appeared to all. No one, who accepts the Bible, accepts this conclusion.

Fourth, also according to Titus 2:11-12, God's grace teaches us. What does God's grace teach us? It teaches that "For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men (Titus 2:11)." However, it also instructs us "to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world (Titus 2:12)." God's grace also teaches us that we are to be "zealous of good works (Titus 2:14)." God's grace goes only to those who live righteously and who are zealous of good works. To disobey God is to reject His grace.

The Bible clearly and repeatedly sets forth the conditions upon which God extends His grace to us. We must believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 8:24), repent of our sins (Acts 17:30), confess the name of Christ before men (Matt. 10:32-33), be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16), and live sober, righteously, and godly in this present world (Titus 2:11-12).

Let us all obey God's will and receive God's grace.

Does Repentance Precede Faith?

In God's great plan of salvation, does repentance come before faith? Oftentimes, when offering the invitation of Christ to the lost, preachers urge their hearers to *repent and believe*. Can we repent before we believe? What does the Bible say?

First, the Bible teaches, "So belief *comes* of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ (Rom 10:17)." God's order is hearing and believing. Repentance cannot precede faith, because without faith, one has no reason to repent. It is through the preached word that we learn of our lost condition and that we must turn away from the practice of sin (Luke 24:47; Rom. 1:16). How can we repent of our sins unless we first learn of them and believe the word that we hear. "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard (Rom 10:14)?"

Second, Peter showed in Acts 15:7 that repentance does not precede faith. Peter said that God selected him to preach to the Gentiles "that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel, and believe." They did not hear and repent; they heard and believed. Only in believing, did they have a basis for repentance.

Third, Acts 2 shows that repentance does not precede faith in the plan that God inspired. This example reveals clearly what God requires of lost people. Acts 2 includes the first gospel sermon preached in the name of the resurrected Christ. Verse 14 records that the apostles stood up and started preaching. In verse 37, many in the audience said, "Brethren, what shall we do?" In verse 38, Peter told them, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." The people, in Acts 2, believed the words of Peter and asked for further instruction. Peter told them to repent, thus showing that they believed before they repented.

Fourth, in the conversion of the jailor at Philippi in Acts 16:30-34, faith preceded repentance. In verse 30 the jailor asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." As a result, "They spoke the word of the Lord unto him." Upon hearing this word, he believed it and obeyed it in verse 33: "And he . . . washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately."

God commands us to hear (Rom 10:17), believe (John 8:24), repent (Acts 17:30), confess (Rom. 1:10), and be baptized (Acts 22:16).

Are Infants Born with Original Sin?

Some religious groups teach that everyone inherits the guilt of Adam's sin. They often refer to this as the doctrine of *original sin*, which holds that people come into this world totally depraved. Does the Bible teach this doctrine?

First, the Bible teaches that children do not inherit the guilt of their parents' sins. Ezekiel settled this question when he wrote, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son (Ezek 18:20)." Apparently, at the time Ezekiel wrote, some held a position close to that of *original sin*. Some of them said, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge (Ezek 18:2)?" God told Ezekiel to condemn this proverb: "As I live, say the Lord Jehovah, you shall not have *occasion* anymore to use this proverb in Israel (Ezek 18:3)."

Second, the descendants of Adam inherit the consequences of his sin but not the guilt of that sin. Because of Adam's sin, physical death passed upon the entire human race: "Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned (Rom 5:12)." There is a great difference between guilt of sin and consequence of sin. Little children sometimes suffer from the consequences of a parent's sin, but they do not suffer the guilt of that parent's sin.

Third, Jesus did not view little children as sinners. He did not teach the doctrine of *original sin*. He held little children up as models for those who would enter the kingdom. Jesus taught, "Verily I say unto you, except you turn, and become as little children, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt 18:3)." Again, he taught, "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven (Matt 19:14)." Jesus did *not* say, "Unless you become as totally depraved children." The doctrine of original sin is not a teaching of Jesus.

Fourth, we are each responsible for our own acts (Ezekiel 18:3, 20). The Bible teaches that children are without sin (Matt: 18:3; 19:14). Obedience to the gospel is for sinful adults—our sins and not Adam's. To be freed from our sins which we have committed, we must believe that Jesus is the Son of God (John 8:24), repent of our sins (Acts 17:30), confess the name of Jesus before men (Rom. 10:10), and be baptized for the remission of our sins (Acts 2; 38; 22:16). Infants are not capable of believing, repenting, and confessing. Nor do they need to, for they are without the original or current sins.

Are Infants Sinners?

In a previous article, we considered the doctrine of *original sin*. Does the Bible teach that babies enter the world bearing upon their souls the guilt of Adam's transgression? Here are further reasons original sin is not a Bible idea or doctrine.

First, the Bible teaches that God is the Father of our spirits (Heb. 12:9). Man does not inherit the soul, but God creates each one directly. From the beginning, God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (Gen. 2:7)." At the end man's "spirit returns unto God who gave it (Eccl. 12:7)." God speaks of "the souls that I have made (Isa. 57:16)." Also, "Thus says Jehovah, who . . . forms the spirit of man within him (Zech. 12:1)." Could or would God create a depraved soul? The soul is as pure as the Father who made it. James said, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning (James 1:17)."

Second, when teaching *original sin*, some claim that Psalms 51:5 teaches that infants are born in sin. The passage reads, "I was brought forth in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me (Psalms 51:5)." However, Acts 2:4 speaks of being born in a language: "And how hear we, every man in our own language wherein we were born (Acts 2:8)?" Being born in a language does not mean that an infant is born speaking a language. It means that they are born where the people speak the language. Infants are not born with original sin attached to their souls.. They are born where people commit sin.

Third, teachers of this doctrine also use Psalms 58:3: "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies (Psalms 58:3)." This passage does not say that infants are born astray; but it says that they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies. Infants certainly cannot speak at birth.

Fourth, infants cannot be sinners or born in sin. Infants do not inherit sin, because sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4). Paul wrote in Eph. 2:3 that the Ephesians "were by nature children of wrath." *By nature* does not mean by birth, for verse 5 says that we were "dead through our trespasses." They were not dead because they had inherited Adam's sin and guilt, but because they had "walked according to the course of this world," and "lived in the lust of our flesh (Eph. 2:2-3)."

The gospel is for the whole creation. "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved (Mark 16:15-16)." Infants cannot yet believe.

Infant Baptism

Infant baptism resulted from the belief that everyone is born in original sin. In New Testament times and in early history, infants did not receive baptism. Does the Bible authorize infant baptism?

First, the Bible does not teach that babies are born in sin. Infants are not born astray, but people go astray: "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies (Psalms 58:3)." God is "the Father of spirits (Heb. 12:9)." Would a holy God place a sinful spirit in an infant?

Second, the conversions recorded in the book of Acts do not mention infants. In fact, the book of Acts states each conversion in such a way as specifically to exclude infants. In Acts 2 on the day Pentecost, the people who were baptized were capable of receiving God's word and repenting (Acts 2:38, 41). Infants are incapable of these acts. Philip did not baptize any infants in the city of Samaria. the people who were baptized were capable of believing (Acts 8:12). Those in the household of Cornelius were not infants because they were capable of hearing God's word (Acts 10:44-48). Those people in Lydia's household who were baptized did not include infants for they were capable of receiving comfort from Paul and Silas (Acts 16:14-15, 40). Paul spoke the "word of the Lord" to the jailor and his house. The people who heard this word had the capacity to believe and rejoice (Acts 16: 30-34). Since the infants in the jailor's house did not have the capacity to believe and rejoice, they were not in the group who received baptism. No infants received baptism at Corinth because the word of God says, "And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized (Acts 18:8)."

Third, the great commission does not include the baptizing of infants (Mark 16:15-16; Matt. 28: 18-20). The great commission requires teaching God's word to people who when they believe his word, are baptized. Those who baptize are to teach believers "to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you. (Matt 28:19-20)." Infants simply cannot fulfill the great commission.

Finally, infants are not sinful and responsible (Matt. 18:3; 19:14). Since they are not sinful, how can they receive baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16)? The gospel, which addresses people who are responsible, excludes children. To be saved, all responsible people must believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of their sins (Acts 17:30), confess Jesus before men (Rom. 10:9-10), and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

The Bible: God's Word for Man

In 1983, President Reagan extolled the Bible and its influence on American life. He said, "Of the many influences that have shaped the United States of America into a distinctive nation and people, none may be more fundamental and enduring than the Bible." It is important to recognize the power and influence of the Bible. We need the principles of God's word to guide our nation and us. How can we give the Bible the proper place in our lives and hearts?

First, read the Bible. Paul told us, "Give diligence to present yourself approved unto God . . . handling aright the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15)." According to Luke, those in Berea accomplished this: "Now these were more noble . . . in that they received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so (Acts 17:11)." The Bible is not just a storage place for family records and documents. God commands all men to study His holy word. It is not enough to read books about the Bible, watch movies about the Bible, or listen to what other people say about the Bible. We must spend our own personal time and thoughts studying the scriptures daily. Each of us must make our own investigation.

Second, recognize that the Bible is God's inspired word. The Bible is complete and furnishes us completely, "Every scripture inspired of God . . . That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17)." Paul teaches that the apostles received the word from God: "Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Spirit teaches; combining spiritual things with spiritual *words* (1 Cor. 2:12-13)." Paul also taught that when we read what he wrote, we can understand it as the word of God: "How that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote before in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ (Eph 3:3-4)." God reveals His mind in the scriptures. We cannot neglect God's revelation of the mystery of Christ.

Third, recognize that the Bible is God's complete will. The scriptures furnish us "completely unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:17)" on our journey from earth to heaven. Jude wrote, ". . . contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints (Jude 3)." Both John and Paul warn that we are not to add anything or take away anything (Rev. 22:18-19; Gal. 1:6-9). Plagues and curses (anathema) come to those who do.

The Bible is God's word for man. Let us take it as our guide.

Irresistible Grace

One of the most marvelous truths of the scripture is that God has extended His grace to fallen man. The Bible teaches that God saves us by grace (Eph. 2:8-9).

Some teach that God's grace is irresistible. This idea alleges that an inward supernatural call draws spiritually dead sinners to God. The Holy Spirit through regeneration makes the dead sinner alive and creates within him faith and repentance. According to this teaching, the supernatural working of the Spirit is necessary because otherwise the sinner would have no desire to turn from sin. The teaching speaks of *irresistible grace* because, to its proponents, the Spirit never fails to convert those to whom He is sent. God extends His grace, the proponents claim, to only the elect, and those so elected cannot thwart or refuse this grace. This teaching is false for a number of reasons.

First, this teaching upholds a false view of man's nature. Human beings are not sinners because they have inherited the sin of Adam but because of their own sins: "Each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad (2 Cor 5:10)." The phrase *each one*, which shows who is responsible, is repeated in Rom 14:12, "So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God." Jesus laid the blame of sin on those who do not obey the Father and based every one's judgment on the same standard: "Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven. . . . And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matt 7:21-23)."

Second, this teaching upholds a false view of the way God extends His grace. According to Titus 2:11-12, God's grace has appeared to all men, and God's grace instructs all men on what they must do to be saved. Jesus declared that God draws men through teaching (John 6:44-45). Everyone can participate in the grace of God by obeying his gospel (2 Peter 3:9; Rom. 6:16-18; 6:1-4).

Third, this teaching upholds a false view of the way God calls. God does not call sinners by a direct and supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit. God calls sinners by the gospel: "He called you through our gospel (2 Thess 2:14)." Paul calls the gospel the "power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16)."

God's grace is available to you through obedience of His word. Do not reject His word and thwart God and His Grace.

The Way to Peace

Men speak of *peace* often during these troubled times. People talk, sing, write, and preach about the word *peace*. The striving for peace is one of life's most noble aspirations. In our topsy-turvy world with so many conflicting ideologies, can we find peace and certainty?

Jesus spoke often about peace. He told his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you (John 14:27)." Paul informed the Philippians, "The peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:7)." Do you possess the peace that passes all understanding? There may be toil and trouble in the world, but you can have peace within your heart. The Bible charts the path to peace in a way that is plain enough for all of us to follow.

First, obedience to the gospel is the way to peace (Rom. 5:1-5; 10:14-17). Acceptance of and obedience to the gospel plan of salvation removes the terrible burden of sin. The examples of conversion in the book of Acts show this to be true. On the day of Pentecost, joy and peace filled the hearts of those who heard the gospel preached, believed, repented, and were baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:14-40; 2:43-47). The Ethiopian nobleman searched the Old Testament scriptures as he traveled by chariot from Jerusalem to Ethiopia (Acts 8:26-40). After hearing Philip preach Jesus (Acts 8:35), he believed, confessed his faith, and was baptized (Acts 8:36-39). After he obeyed the gospel, the Bible says of the Ethiopian, "He went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:39)." Obedience to the gospel brought salvation and peace to this man from Ethiopia.

Second, daily practice of the teaching of our Lord, Jesus, secures peace (John 14:1-20). One, who walks with the Lord and according to his word, walks with peace and certainty, because the word makes him "complete, furnished completely unto every good work (2 Tim 3:17)." The words of Jesus are spirit and life (John 6:63) and his word will judge each of us (John 12:48). We may rest assured in his word.

Finally, does the peace that passes understanding dwell in your heart? By obeying the word of Christ, you can attain that peace. Paul admonished us, "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to the which also you were called in one body; and be you thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly (Col 3:15-16)."

The avenue to peace is obedience to the word of Christ.

A Sure and Certain Guide

Are you looking for the sure and certain guide to your religious life? Some think that all different ways are safe and secure guides to religious life. We cannot trust some guides. Jesus said some ways lead to destruction: "Enter you in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby (Matt, 7:13-14)." Jesus also warned us to let these ways alone: "Let them alone: they are blind guides (Matt. 15:13-14)." What should we consider in choosing a sure and certain guide for our religious lives?

First, we do not have the ability to guide ourselves. Jeremiah said, "O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps (Jer. 10:23)." Since we cannot direct our steps, we all need assistance; however, that assistance must come from a sure and certain guide.

Second, we must avoid the ways that lead to death. Solomon warned, "There is a way which seems right unto a man; But the end thereof are the ways of death (Prov. 14:12)." Since the ways of error lead to spiritual death, how can we avoid being deceived and victimized by religious error.

Third, we must seize the only sure and certain guide in religion, the word of God. David said, "The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul: the testimony of Jehovah is **sure**, making wise the simple (Ps 19:7)." If we want to know what to believe and how to live, the Bible is the sure and certain guide. David also said, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path (Ps 119:105)."

Fourth, we can trust what the Bible, the sure and certain guide, says upon every religious question. God's word provides all that we need to answer these questions: "Seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him (2 Peter 1:3)." The scriptures constitute a sure and certain guide, making us complete (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Finally, the sure and certain name to wear is Christian and that name alone (Acts 11:26). The true and certain church is the church of Christ (Matt. 16:13-19; Rom. 16:16; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:22-30). The sure and certain guide to salvation is exactly what Jesus and the apostles taught: believe, repent, and be baptized (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:22-40).

We can be sure and certain of the answers the Bible, the sure and certain guide, gives us.

The Sabbath Day

A confusing question confronts us when we seek to do the will of God: "When and how am I to worship?" Must we worship on the seventh or Sabbath day as the people of the Old Testament did? The Bible shows that Christians today are not to observe the Sabbath day.

First, God gave the Sabbath day to the Jewish nation for their observance. Moses said, "Jehovah made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us (Deut 5:3)." The context shows that Moses was speaking of the ten commandments. God did not give the children of Israel the Sabbath day to observe until after they left the land of Egypt and were in the wilderness (Ezekiel 20:10-12).

Second, the reference to the Sabbath as *perpetual covenant* does not mean that it was forever. It was a continuing covenant with Israel, but only throughout their generations: "Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant (Ex 31:16)." God removed the Old Testament law and gave in its place a better covenant: "By so much also hath Jesus become the surety of a better covenant (Heb 7:22)." The better covenant includes better promises: "He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon better promises (Heb 8:6-7)." The Old Testament law passed away and with it the Sabbath command: "In that he says, A new *covenant* he has made the first old. But that which is becoming old and waxes aged is nigh unto vanishing away (Heb 8:13)." Upon the death of the Christ, the covenant with Israel ended, being nailed to the cross: "Having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he has taken it out that way, nailing it to the cross (Col 2:14)." With the end of the old covenant and the coming of the new, God blotted out the specifics of the old, including the Sabbath.

Third, God commands Christians to worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Heb. 10:25; Rev. 1:10). The Bible does not refer to the first day of the week as the Sabbath day. God did not change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. God abolished the Sabbath, along with all the elements of the Old Testament Law (Col.2:14; Eph. 2:15; Rom. 7:4-7). Paul declared that God's people are not to be judged by the Sabbath: "Let no man therefore judge you . . . in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a Sabbath day (Col 2:16)."

Members of the Lord's church are to meet on the first day of the week to hear the gospel preached, partake of the Lord's supper, and give as they have prospered (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2).

Are Scriptures an All-sufficient Guide?

Modern religions use many different sources for their authority in religion: disciplines, manuals, creed books, latter day revelations, and utterances of men. These come from man, not from God. The Bible teaches free, diligent, and unprejudiced study of the scriptures as the all-sufficient guide in matters of faith and practice.

Jesus taught that God's will was in his teaching. He said, "If any man wills to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or *whether* I speak from myself (John 7:17)." The power of the truth of God makes us free from sin. In John 8:32, Jesus taught, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Jesus said, "Sanctify them in the truth: your word is truth (John 17:17)." Paul calls this word the gospel of our salvation: "In whom you also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation (Eph 1:13)." The truth will lead us to God's truth and our salvation.

Since God's truth is in scriptures, we should seek our answers by searching the scriptures. Jesus showed that searching the scriptures reveals knowledge of eternal life, "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me (John 5:39)." The scriptures are the source and the method is searching. Acts 17:11 describes Christians who did just that: "They received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so." The teaching is plain. To know the truth, search the scriptures with a ready mind.

How sufficient are the scriptures? Paul wrote in 2 Tim 3:16-17: "Every scripture inspired of God (is) also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." The scriptures, the all-sufficient word of God, make us complete and furnish us completely to every good work.

Will there be new revelations? Jude said, "Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints (Jude 3). Paul warned in Gal. 1:8-9, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema." John warned, "If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city (Rev 22:19)."

The scriptures are our all-sufficient guide in matters of faith and practice for all time.

The Plan of Salvation

God has revealed his plan for the salvation of the world in the scriptures. All of us can understand and obey God's plan. Isaiah wrote, "And a highway shall be there, and a way and it shall be called the way of holiness; . . . it shall be for *the redeemed*: the wayfaring men, yea fools, shall not err *therein* (Isa. 35:8)." God welcomes and His son calls every weary, sin-sick soul, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that hears, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17)."

God centered his plan for saving us from sin and death on His son Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a sinless life, died for sinners at the hands of sinful men, and demonstrated his power over sin and death in his resurrection. John wrote, "Jesus said unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one comes unto the Father, but by me (John 14:6)." Peter affirmed this principle of salvation, "In none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved (Acts 4:12)."

The Bible teaches that God has one plan of salvation. Just as there is one saviour, Christ, there is one plan of salvation. Paul taught the unity and oneness of God's plan in Eph. 4:4-6, "*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all.*" The conversions in the book of Acts emphasize the oneness of God's plan for salvation. Each example of conversion gives the same plan and the same requirements for salvation (Acts 2, 8, 10, 16, 18, and 22). This plan of salvation leaves no room for the deviations and systems which men devise.

God's gave all authority to His son Jesus (Matt. 28:18). Therefore, Jesus has the right to command the terms upon which he will save us. Jesus and his inspired apostles stated the response that we must make to receive the blessings offered by his plan of salvation. The Bible teaches us exactly how to respond to the Lord's plan of salvation. We must hear the word of God in order to have faith (Rom. 10:17). Faith comes by hearing and without faith, it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Based on our faith, we must repent and turn to God (Acts 2:38; 3:19). God requires that we confess our faith in Christ Jesus (Rom. 10:9-10). We are to be baptized into Christ to put on Christ and for the remission of our sins (Gal. 3:27; Rom 6:3-4; Acts 2:38).

God's plan of salvation includes living faithfully in Christ and his church unto the point of death (John. 15:1-6; Tit, 2:11-14; Rev. 2:10).

Religious Titles: What Does the Bible Say?

The wearing of religious titles is very common today. Often, ministers, preachers, and religious teachers wear titles in such a way as to set them apart as a special group of holy people. Does the Bible uphold this practice? What does the Bible say about wearing religious titles?

First, Jesus addressed the question of wearing religious titles in Matt. 23:7-10. Jesus condemned the wearing of such religious titles as *master*, *rabbi*, and *father*. Jesus spoke clearly on this subject when he said in Matt 23:9, "And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, *even* he who is in heaven."

Second, the word *reverend* is never used in the Bible as a religious title. The word *reverend* is used in Psalms 111:9 in reference to God's name: "He hath sent redemption unto his people; He hath commanded his covenant forever: Holy and reverend is his name." The word *reverend* is never used in the Bible to designate any human beings. The New Testament does not refer to Paul as Reverend Paul, nor does it refer to Peter as Reverend Peter. Look at the beginning of Paul's letters where he refers to himself, and you will never find where he refers to himself as Reverend Paul (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1). Paul referred to himself as a preacher, a teacher, and an apostle (2 Tim. 1:11). Paul commanded Timothy, "But be sober in all things, suffer hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Tim. 4:5)." The highest religious titles, which are so common today, are unknown to the New Testament.

Third, the Bible teaches that every member of Christ's church or kingdom is a priest. Peter wrote "But ye are a elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for (God's) own possession (1 Pet. 2:9)." John added, "And he made us *to be* a kingdom, *to be* priests unto his God and Father (Rev 1:6)." The idea that only preachers or those who publicly proclaim the word are priests is erroneous. Members of the Lord's church are not divided into a *clergy* and laity relationship (Gal. 3:28). Jesus said to his disciples, ". . . and all you are brethren (Matt. 23:8)." Peter referred to Paul as *brother Paul* and not *Father Paul*, *Reverend Paul*, or *Clergyman Paul*. Followers of Christ are not to use worldly titles, but they are to "speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11)."

The Bible teaching is clear on use of religious titles. Paul wrote, "You be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind . . . each counting other better than himself (Phil 2:2-3)."

Faith and Works – Grace and Works

Religious people often discuss the subjects, *Faith and Works* and *Grace and Works*. It is important to understand what God's word says about these subjects. We need to note a number of Biblical principles.

First, the Bible speaks of different kinds of works and different kinds of faith. Rom. 4:1-6 discusses works that God excludes from His plan for our salvation. James 2:14-26 deals with works that God includes in His plan. Paul, in Romans 4, speaks of seeking salvation through works of the Law of Moses and works of human merit. James, on the other hand, discusses works that perfect faith. This faith, so perfected, is a faith that is obedient to God's commands (1 John 2:4; 2 Thess. 1:7-9). We cannot devise the works that will save us. God has a plan of salvation; we all must be obedient (Rom. 6:16-19).

Second, the Bible teaches that salvation is by the grace of God, but it does not teach that it is by grace alone (Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 2:11-12). If salvation is by grace alone, then God will save all, because Paul shows in Titus 2 that God's grace has appeared to all. The Bible teaches that we do not deserve salvation, that we cannot earn it, and that it comes only from God when we do the works that he has prepared for us (Eph. 2:10; Rom. 6:23; James 1:17).

Third, the Bible teaches clearly that faith must be obedient and that God's grace is conditional. A faith that refuses to obey God is a dead faith and cannot save us (John 12:42-43). Faith that is acceptable to God must express itself in action (James 2:14-17). Unexpressed faith is dead faith (James 2:24-26). Saving faith leads us to acts of obedience. We find examples of this obedient faith in Heb. 11. One example is in Heb. 11:30: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been compassed about for seven days." Did the walls of Jericho fall down the moment the Israelites believed? No, the walls fell down after they had obeyed God's command to compass about the walls of the city for seven days. When does faith save us? Faith saves us after it expresses itself in obedience to God's commands.

God extends His grace to us on the condition that we obey His word. God's word teaches us that God saves by grace all those who believe (Heb. 11:6), repent (Luke 13:3), confess (Rom. 10:9-10), and receive baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). God will meet and pardon sinners by grace through faith upon these conditions.

"We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God afore prepared. (Eph 2:10)."

Personal Feelings and True Religion

The basis for our religious faith and practice is of primary importance. We must determine to what extent personal feelings should influence our faith and practice. Let us consider several points.

First, in recent years, many place great emphasis upon feelings, experiences, and subjectivity in religion. Some say, "I am a born again spirit-filled Christian. Let me tell you about my experience." Many think such marvelous religious sensations are proof of salvation.

Second, feelings are an important part of true religion, but feelings alone are not sufficient. The book of Acts shows that people enjoyed peace of mind and heart only after they had obeyed the gospel. In Acts 8:39-40, after the Ethiopian nobleman received baptism, he "went on his way rejoicing." The Philippian jailor "took them the same hour of the night . . . and was baptized, and he . . . rejoiced greatly, with all his house (Acts 16: 33-34)." Emotional experience cannot replace God's word and obedience to that word. Heb. 5:8-9 teaches, "Though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered . . . he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation." Saul felt good while he persecuted the church (Acts 26:9), illustrating that feelings can be deceptive.

Third, the only safe standard for victorious and happy life is the word of God (Psalms 119:105, 130; 2 Peter 1:3-4). Today, many have discarded the objective standard of God's word and have substituted for it the subjective standard of feeling and experience. Bible obedience is not a matter of following uncertain voices within our own hearts, confusing human impulse with the working of the Holy Spirit. The knowledge of God and obedience to the Gospel transcend our personal feelings. Paul taught that the Lord Jesus will come "rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus (2 Thess 1:7-9). Knowing God and obeying the gospel transcend any personal feelings and emotions in determining religious faith and practice.

Finally, the Holy Spirit made known the word of God through inspired men (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Cor2:10-13; Eph. 3:3-4). The word of God is the absolute standard in religion. Assurance and joy come from obedience to God's word (Gal. 5:6; John 14:15; 1 John 2:3-4). Often, people are infatuated with emotional and exciting experiences that they call, "Love for the Lord." The Bible teaches that keeping God's commandments expresses real love (John 14:2-24). "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: (1 John 5:3)."

What Does the Bible Teach about Easter?

Do you attend church only on Easter Sunday? Some people think that it is more important to attend church on Easter Sunday than at any other time. Some believe that this attendance only on Easter makes them a Christian. What does the Bible teach about Easter?

First, the Bible teaches us to be faithful at all worship services. We must attend services at times other than Easter. The scriptures teach that Christians should not miss worship service: “Not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting *one another*; and so much the more, as you see the day drawing nigh (Heb 10:25).” The early church met on the first day of every week to worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). Jesus arose from the dead on the first day of the week (Luke 24:1, 13, 21, and 46). We cannot measure up to the requirements of the gospel by attending spasmodically or only on Easter Sunday (1 Cor. 15:58; Rev. 2:10).

Second, the Bible teaches us that we should observe the resurrection of Christ weekly, not yearly. The resurrection is one of the bedrock principles of Christianity, and God has provided a way to keep the resurrection fresh in our minds and hearts. The Bible commands Christians to partake of the Lord’s Supper upon every first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-24). Christians are to assemble every first day of the week to celebrate the resurrection. When Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper, he said, “This do in remembrance of me (1 Cor. 11:24-25).” He also said he would be present when we observe the Supper: “I shall not drink . . . this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom (Matt. 26:29).”

Third, the Bible does not teach Christians to observe special days and seasons, such as Ash Wednesday, Lent, and Easter (2 John 9). Paul condemned such practices in Gal. 4:10-11, “Ye observe days, and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid of you, lest by any means I have bestowed labor upon you in vain.” Christians are not to exalt one first day of the week over another; but rather, we are to assemble every first day of the week to observe the death, the burial, and the resurrection of our Lord (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 11:23-27).

Finally, the Bible never teaches that Easter is a named holy day. The word *Easter* appears only one time in the King James Version of the English Bible (Acts 12:4). All other versions correctly translate the word *Passover*. “When he had taken him . . . and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to guard him; intending after the Passover to bring him forth to the people (Acts 12:4).”

A Christian Just as Paul Was

One of the great truths of the Bible is that people of today can be simple New Testament Christians just as Paul was. Please read the great speech that Paul made before King Agrippa in Acts 26. Paul did all that he could do to convert the young king to the Lord Jesus. As Paul concluded he told Agrippa, "I would to God . . . that all that hear me this day, might become such as I am (Acts 26:29)." We all can be Christians just as Paul was. Let us consider what the Bible teaches.

First, the Bible teaches that to be a Christian just as Paul was, we must obey the gospel just as Paul did. Three chapters in Acts tell about Paul's conversion (Acts 9, 22, and 26). From these accounts we learn that Paul heard the word (Acts 9:4), believed in Christ (Acts 9:6), and repented of his sins (Acts 9:9; Acts 17:30). He must have confessed his faith in Christ because he later wrote, "Confession with the mouth is unto salvation (Rom. 10:10)." Paul also submitted to baptism to wash away his sins. Ananias "Now why do you tarry? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name (Acts 22:16)." We can all obey these requirements of the gospel just as Paul did.

Second, Paul's conversion is an example for all who want to be saved just as Paul was saved. When Paul became a Christian, he did not make a decision for Christ, leaving out one or more of the above requirements. He did not become a Christian by faith only or by grace only or by any other man-made plan. He did not sign a pledge card giving himself to the Lord or raise his hand to indicate that he wanted to be saved. Paul became a Christian by obeying the gospel and being born again (Rom. 6:16-19; Col. 1:13; John 3:5).

Third, when we obey the gospel just as Paul obeyed the gospel we can wear the name *Christian* (Acts 11:26), just as Paul wore the name *Christian*. Paul urged Agrippa and all who heard his word to wear the name *Christian* (Acts 26:28-29). Paul condemned the wearing of human names in 1 Cor. 1:10-16). Peter wrote, "And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved (Acts 4:12)." We can wear the name *Christian*, just as Paul did.

In summary, we can be Christians just as Paul was by obeying the same commands of the gospel that he obeyed. We can obey these commands and be saved just as Paul was saved. We can wear the name *Christian*, just as Paul wore that name. We can know that salvation is in the name of Christ; and his name, alone, saves us. We can be Christians just as Paul was a Christian.

Obedience to the Gospel

By studying the scriptures, we realize that man is a responsible being who must respond to God's call (Joshua 24:14-15). The Bible teaches that the gospel is God's power to save the lost (Rom. 1:16). The Bible emphasizes obedience in 2 Thess. 1:7-9, where the apostle Paul taught that God will punish those "that know not God, and . . . obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus." We must understand the gospel and the meaning of obedience to the gospel. Consider the following points.

First, in obeying the gospel, there are certain facts that we must believe. Paul discussed these facts in 1 Cor. 15:1-4. In verse one, Paul talks about the gospel: "Now I make known unto you brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand." In preaching this gospel, Paul delivered certain facts that we must accept. In verse three through four, Paul states these facts: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures; and that he appeared. . . ." Of these facts, Paul said, "By which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached unto you, except you believed in vain." Believing these marvelous facts of the gospel is fundamental to our salvation.

Second, we must accept the commands of the gospel. Paul shows that we must obey the commands of the gospel in Rom. 6:17-18: "Whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness." What form of teaching did Paul deliver, and what form did they obey? Their obedience culminated in baptism: "All we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him through baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-4)." Our baptism follows the other Bible commands. We must believe (Mark 16:16), repent of our sins (Acts 17:30) and confess the Lord (Rom. 10:9-10). Obeying these commands makes us free from sin and servants of righteousness (Rom.6:17-18).

Finally, in obeying the gospel, we receive and enjoy the promises of the Lord. Accordingly, we receive the remission of our sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Baptism washes away our sins (Acts 22:16). The waters of baptism save us (1 Pet. 3:21). Following baptism, we walk in newness of life. We receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10), if we are faithful unto death.

The Church, God's Called out People

The New Testament presents the church as a divine institution. God planned and established the church (Eph. 3:9-12). The church exists in the world as a manifestation of God's glory and God's desire to save the lost (Eph. 3: 20-21). The church is God's called out people.

First, the word *church* in the New Testament carries the idea of those who hear the call of God and obey it. Jesus taught, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that has heard from the Father, and has learned, comes unto me (John 6:44-45). According to Paul, the called are the church, the sanctified, saints, "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, *even* them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:2)."

Second, Jesus calls every sin-laden individual to follow him. He said, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28)." Sin imposes a heavy burden on us all, but Jesus promises to remove it, if we will answer his call.

Third, God calls everyone through the gospel. Paul said in 2 Thess. 2:13-14, "Whereunto he called you through our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is a clear statement of how God calls the lost to Himself. He calls through the gospel. Paul explains how that faith comes of this gospel, the word of God. He wrote, "So belief *comes* of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17)." Paul further declared, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). God calls the church out of the world and to Christ through His word. This is the only way God has said that He calls us out of the world.

Fourth, God calls us out of darkness into light. Peter wrote, ". . . you may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9)." John also affirmed this very fact, "And this is the message . . . that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:5-7)."

In conclusion, God calls us out of the world into the church. He calls us out of sin. He calls us with the gospel of Christ. He calls out of darkness and into His marvelous light. Indeed, we become the church, the called out body of Christ.

Faith without Works

Many in the religious world do not understand the relation between faith and works. The book of James shows that the faith that saves is a working, obedient faith. The works that save are our obedience to the commands God has given. The following points, which James makes, allow us to see that faith alone will not save us..

First, James declares that faith without works is unprofitable: "What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he has faith, but have not works? Can that faith save him (James 2:14)?"

Second, faith without works is a mere saying that we have faith (James 2:14). It is easy to talk about faith, but this is not enough. We must demonstrate our faith by our works. Jesus said, "And why call you me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say (Luke 6:46)?"

Third, James shows that faith alone does not save (James 2:14). His question, "Can that faith save him?" rhetorically asserts that faith alone cannot save us. Faith unaccompanied by the works, which God commanded, is powerless to save.

Fourth, faith without works is a dead faith. James said, "Faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself (James 2:17)." In verse 26, James compares an inactive faith to a body without spirit: "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead."

Fifth, we must demonstrate our faith. In James 2:18, James said, "Yea, a man will say, you have faith, and I have works: show me *your* faith apart from *your* works, and I by my works will show you *my* faith. It is impossible to demonstrate our faith without works.

Sixth, the demons believe and shudder without any works at all. James said, "You believe that God is one; you do well: the demons also believe, and shudder (James 2:19)." Faith, such as the demons have, will not save us.

Seventh, faith without works is a barren faith. James said, "But will you know, O vain man, that faith apart from works is barren (James 2:20)?" All the great men and women of the Old Testament had a faith that worked (Heb. 11). James cites Abraham as an example for us today: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? You see that faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect (James 2:21-22)."

James concludes, "You see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith (James 2:14)." We must believe and obey God.

Washing Away Our Sins

God speaks clearly and plainly on the subject of salvation and the forgiveness of our sins and the effect of the shed blood of Jesus. We all need to consider the Bible teaching on what we must do to receive these blessings.

The Bible teaches that the blood of Christ washes away our sins. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, he taught, "For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins (Matt 26:27-28)." Paul added, "In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses (Eph. 1:7)." John tells in the Revelation that the saints who overcame "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14)." Without the blood of Christ, we cannot have the remission of sins and the forgiveness of our trespasses.

The Bible teaches that it is in baptism that our sins are washed away. Ananias told Saul of Tarsus, "And now why do you tarry? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name (Acts 22:16)." This passage teaches that our sins are washed away in baptism. It is in baptism that sins are washed away. What washes away our sins is baptism. John wrote, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood (Rev 1:5)." The blood of Christ is *what* washes away our sins. In baptism is when our sins are washed away.

Paul teaches these truths in Rom. 3:3-4 and Col. 2:11-12. Paul said, "Know you not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death (Rom. 6:3)?" In verse 4, he said that we are raised to walk in newness of life. Our sins are gone, left in death, and cleansed by the blood, which Jesus shed in his death. The Bible does not mention any other way to reach the blood of Christ except to be baptized into his death where his blood was shed: "But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water (John 19:34)." When we believe in Christ, repent of our sins, confess his name before men, we are then ready to be baptized into the death of Christ where we encounter the blood of Christ and his blood cleanses us of all sin.

Paul teaches in Col. 2:12 and Rom 6:5 that our newness of life and our resurrection depend on baptism into Christ's death where his blood washes away our sins: Those saved were "buried with him in baptism, wherein you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead (Col. 2:12)."

The Rending of the Veil of the Temple

A miraculous event took place during the crucifixion of Jesus. Matthew says, "And Jesus . . . yielded up his spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom (Matt 27:50-51)." The rending of the veil has to do with the relationship of the Old Testament law and the New Testament law of Jesus Christ. God performed a supernatural act in the rending of the veil.

The rending of the veil symbolized the removal of the office of an earthly high priest. The veil was the very pivot of the Old Testament system. Only the high priest could pass within the area sheltered by the veil. Even he could pass through only once a year (Lev. 16). When Christ died, the veil was torn from top to bottom. With the end of the area sheltered by the veil, came the end of the Old Testament and its high priest.

The only high priest remaining is Jesus Christ, and he has entered the holy of holies not made with hands. The Hebrews writer said, "But Christ having come a high priest . . . through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption (Heb 9:11-12)."

Today, Jesus is the only high priest and the only mediator. Of his high priesthood, Hebrews says, "Jesus entered for us, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 6:20)." Paul called Jesus "one mediator also between God and men, *himself* man, Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5)." Since the one and only high priest is in heaven, there is no need for a veil to separate the high priest from the priests. There is no longer need for daily sacrifices such as the ones offered when the old law was in force because the sacrifice of Jesus was sufficient for all time. Jesus does not have to repeat the sacrifice: "Who needs not daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the *sins* of the people: for this he did once for all, when he offered up himself (Heb 7:27)." Today every Christian is a priest in the new sanctuary, the church. Peter wrote, "You also, as living stones . . . to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God (1 Peter 2:5)."

The rending of the veil symbolized the end of the Law of Moses and its rituals: "He hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross (Col 2:14)." Christ's law is in force and binding (Heb. 8:6-13). Christ frees us from sin when we obey his covenant (Heb 9:14-17).

Why Did God Remove the Law of Moses?

God tore the veil that separated the holy from the most holy place within the temple, when Jesus died upon the cross (Matt. 27:51). This remarkable event signified that God had removed the Law of Moses, the Old Testament. Why do people who live today not serve under the laws of the Old Testament? Why did God remove it?

God removed the old covenant because we needed a better covenant to overcome sin and death. Hebrews tells us, "For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins (Heb 10:4)." The Old Testament was good for its purpose, which was to bring us to Christ. Accordingly, Paul wrote, "For Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to every one that believes (Rom 10:4)." Paul also described the purpose of the law as a tutor, "So that the law is become our tutor (to bring us) unto Christ (Gal 3:24)." Christ taught, "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill (Matt 5:17)."

With the death of Christ, God removed the old covenant. The Hebrew writer said, "He is the mediator of a new covenant that . . . they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15)." Hebrews shows how this new covenant is better than the old covenant: "But now hath he obtained a ministry the more excellent, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon better promises (Heb 8:6)." The fault of the first covenant was its inability to redeem us from our sins: "For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then would no place have been sought for a second (Heb.8:7)."

With the death of Christ, God changed the priesthood and that change necessitated a change in the law: "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law (Heb. 7:12)." The Old Testament law with its priesthood could not overcome sin and death, and therefore, God gave us a better priest, better promises, and a better law. Heb. 9:11-12 teaches: "But Christ having come a high priest of the good things to come, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption."

God promised: "This is the covenant that I will make with them. And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. . . . where remission . . . is, there is no more offering for sin (Heb 10:16-17)."

The New Earth

Some religious people speculate about what will occur when the world ends and Jesus returns. The apostle Peter gives a vivid description of this event in 2 Peter 3:8-13. He concludes with verse 13: "But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness." What is the *new earth* of which Peter speaks? Is it a literal, material planet inhabited by flesh and blood creatures? Is it a physical place where people live after this age ends? What does the Bible teach?

First, the new earth of which Peter speaks is a figurative description of heaven, the present abode of God. Heaven is described as a house (2 Cor. 5:1), a city (Rev. 22:14; Heb. 11:14), a country (Heb. 11:14-16), and a planet (2 Pet. 3:13). Jesus spoke of the eternal abode of God as a house, and in that house, he spoke of many mansions. Clearly, city, house, and country refer to the same state, heaven. As city, house, and country refer to the same state, also earth, a planet, refers to that state. The new earth is not a literal planet, as some teach, but rather the new earth is one of many figures used to communicate the reality of an eternal dwelling place.

Second, Christians do not center their hope on this earth. God's people "desire a better (country), that is, a heavenly (Heb. 11:16)." Paul said, "Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth (Col. 3:2)."

Third, Jesus made it very clear that our reward is in heaven. He said, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven (Matt. 5:12)." Not only is our reward in heaven, but God is in heaven. We are told, "Glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:16)." In agreement with this, Paul teaches, "If the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens (2 Cor. 5:1)." Therefore, the eternal dwelling place of the redeemed is not on a literal planet earth.

The Bible teaches that God's throne is eternal in the heavens. John recorded, "Straightway I was in the Spirit: and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and one sitting upon the throne (Rev. 4:2)." His saints will surround that throne forever, "Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple: . . . They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb . . . shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rev. 7:15-17)."

It Pays to Investigate

Have you ever asked yourself the question, “Why are there so many churches today and which one did Christ build?” At some time, almost every religious person has pondered this problem. What answers does the Bible give to these important questions?

Jesus said to Peter in Matt. 16:18: “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Just as Jesus had predicted, after his cruel death on the cross, he established his church, in Jerusalem, on the first Pentecost after his resurrection from the dead (Acts 2). Peter, along with the other apostles, stood in the midst of a great crowd of people who had come from all parts of the Roman Empire. Peter preached the first gospel sermon.

The results of Peter’s sermon were profound. Thousands of people responded to the sermon and asked, “Brethren, what shall we do (Acts 2:37)?” Peter answered them by saying, “Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38).” “They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added *unto them* in that day about three thousand souls (Acts 2:41; See also 2:47).” No one voted these almost 3,000 souls into church; the Lord added them to his church. This was the first congregation of the Lord’s church.

These apostles, taught by Jesus, also taught and recorded in the New Testament all the instructions and authority needed for the work, worship, and organization of the church. With this written record of instructions in the New Testament, there is no need for any additional creeds, dogmas, disciplines, manuals, conventions, synods, or earthly headquarters. Jude and the Revelation warn us about adding or taking away from the New Testament teaching. Jude said, “Whosoever goes onward and abides not in the teaching of Christ has not God (Jude 3).” The Revelation promised plagues on those that add or take away from “the words of the prophecy of this book (Rev. 22:18-19).”

The Lord builds his church only according to the New Testament pattern. Paul wrote to Timothy, “Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 1:13).” The sound words tell us all that we need to know about the nature, laws, and practices of the church (2 Tim. 3: 17).

When we investigate what church Jesus built, we must look for the church that follows the teaching and examples of the New Testament, and the church that carries his name, church of Christ.

Just Christians

Today, many have become tired of and confused by human creeds, human names, and denominational church organizations. Are you one who is seeking to return to the simplicity of New Testament Christianity? We can all be just Christians. We can establish the right relationship with God and never affiliate with any human denominational body. How can we do this?

First, by following the Bible only, we can be sure to speak just as God would have us speak. Peter said, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11)." Paul said, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God. . . . That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim 3:16-17)." God has given us His complete and divine word. God warns us not to change or alter it in any manner. Paul warned those that do, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed (Gal 1:6-8)." John concludes the Revelation with a similar warning, "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book (Rev. 22:18)." John also warned those who take away from the "words of the book of this prophecy (Rev 22:19)."

Second, by accepting the Christ as our only creed and the Bible as our only guidebook, we will never accept an error, nor will an erroneous creed book or doctrine prevent us from knowing the truth as God presents it. Jesus said, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32)." To this he added, "Sanctify them in truth: your word is truth (John 17:17)."

Third, by restoring the church as it existed in the first century, we can have exactly the church that Christ built (Matt. 16:18). The congregations of the New Testament were churches of Christ. Rom. 16:16 tells us, "All the churches of Christ salute you." The Bible describes the church with other names that speak to the relationships that we members sustain. Among them are *the church of God* (1 Cor. 1:2), *the body of Christ* (1 Cor. 12:27), and *the household of faith* (Gal. 6:10). The Bible never uses sectarian or human names to describe the church of Christ or its individual members (Acts 11:26; 1 Cor. 1:10-17).

Finally, by accepting God's plan just as it is in the Bible, we can know what to do to be saved. We must do the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21-23). God's will for our salvation is in specific terms. Acts 2:37-41 says that those who repented and were baptized for the remission of their sins were saved, and the Lord added them to the church.

Why So Many Bible Interpretations?

People interpret the Bible in many different ways. Why do people who are equally sincere, educated, and determined interpret the Bible so differently? Does the fault lie with the Bible or us?

First, ignorance of God's word often leads to differences in interpretation and misunderstandings. This situation existed during the ministry of our Lord. Ignorance of the scriptures caused the Pharisees to bring false charges against Jesus (See Matt. 9:10-13; 12:1-7). Christ told the Sadducees, "You do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God (Matt 22:29)." Ignorance of God's word caused the Jews to crucify Christ (Luke 23:24; Acts 3:17). Paul persecuted the church out of ignorance (1 Tim.1:13-14). A failure to study and rightly divide the scriptures causes many of our religious differences.

Second, a lack of personal study of the Bible can produce different Bible interpretations. Superficial study can allow false teachers to victimize us (1 Tim. 4:1-6). The Bible calls on each of us to investigate and learn God's will (Acts 17:11; Eph. 5:17). Do you depend on a preacher, friend, or relative to tell you what the Bible says, or do you study God's word for yourself. John tells us to test every spirit: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world (1 John 4:1)." We must study the Bible for ourselves.

Third, using human creed books leads us to many different interpretations of the Bible. Church dogmas, church manuals, and catechisms mold all explanations of the Bible to conform to the various beliefs held by men. What men say becomes more important than what the word of God says. The Bible presents one message that we can all understand and understand alike. Jesus taught that the truth makes us free: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32)." He also taught that truth is the word of God: "Sanctify them in the truth: your word is truth (John 17:17)." Our role is to study the word of God, the truth, for ourselves: "Give diligence to present yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15)." If we all handle aright the word of truth, we will all be one in that truth. Paul exhorts us in 1 Cor. 1:10 to speak the same thing "that there be no divisions among you." This unity in Christ can only come when we all study, understand, and interpret the Bible for ourselves.

Let us all set aside every human teaching, dogma, and doctrine and hold fast to the truth of God's word which can make us truly free.

“I Don’t Believe Everything My Church Teaches.”

Religious people often say: “I don’t go along with everything that my church teaches.” These people usually are sincere and concerned people who question the doctrine or practices of their churches. What does this say about the religious situation today?

First, this statement says that many churches do not base their beliefs and practices on God’s word. Some members read and study the Bible for themselves and find out that the Bible does not authorize many of the beliefs and practices of their specific church. They may also learn that we all are to speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11) and that none of us must add to or take away from the word of God (Rev. 22:18-19). These folks are between the proverbial rock and a hard place. Desiring to be loyal to the word of God and finding themselves at odds with the teaching of their church, they become selective in what they believe, rejecting their church’s teaching of specific error but staying in their church as a member.

Second, this practice emphasizes the need to go back to the first century and to New Testament Christianity. The New Testament reveals what the church was and should be (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23 and 5:22-31). By going back beyond denominationalism to the time when only the Lord’s church existed, we learn God added all Christians to the one church (Acts 2:47) and only Christians made up the one church (1 Cor. 12:27). When Christianity began, there were no divisions (John 17:20-21) and no denominations (Eph. 4:4-6).

Third, this practice violates the Bible principle that the church has no authority to formulate doctrine or teaching (1 Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Tim 3:16-17). No true Christian could say, “I do not believe everything my church teaches,” because the true church bases beliefs on the inspired word of God and that alone (Jude 3). If we know that a practice is unscriptural, and maintain our fellowship with those that practice it, we violate the specific teaching of 2 John 9-11: “Whosoever goes onward and abides not in the teaching of Christ, has not God . . . If any one comes unto you, and brings not this teaching . . . give him no greeting: for he that gives him greeting partakes in his evil works.”

Finally, this practice keeps people from being just Christians (1 Peter 4: 16) and belonging to the only church Christ built (Matt. 16:18) and following only God’s word (Col. 3:17) in name, organization, membership, work, worship, and unity.

Bible Facts Concerning the Church

The scriptures clearly and definitely set forth the essential facts about the church established by Jesus Christ. These scriptural facts outline the pattern for all to see and to follow. Paul commanded, "Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 1:13)." We should all note the facts that make up this pattern.

First, Christ is the founder (Matt. 16:18). God authorizes no human beings, no matter how great, to build or found a church.

Second, the church originated in Jerusalem, in approximately 30 A.D. (Acts 2:1-47). Any church with a different date and place of origin cannot be the church of Christ.

Third, Christ is the head of the church (Col. 1:18). The Bible does not authorize any man or group of men to be head of the church. God reserves this position for Christ and Christ alone (Matt. 28: 18-20).

Fourth, only the Lord adds members to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). In these passages, these early Christians heard the word, believed the word, obeyed the word in baptism, and were saved. The Lord added to the church daily those that were saved. There was no voting in the early church to see whether they should accept someone.

Fifth, the members of the church wear scriptural names. The Bible calls individual members saints (Acts 9:13), disciples (Acts 6:1), brethren (Acts 6:3), and Christians (Acts 11:26). The Bible calls a collective group of Christians the church (Phil. 3:6), the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27), and churches of Christ (Rom. 16:16). The Bible condemns the wearing of human names (1 Cor. 1:10-13).

Sixth, the Bible specifies the worship of the church. The church of the Bible assembled weekly on the Lord's Day for partaking of the Lord's supper (Acts 20:7), for preaching of God's word (Acts 20:7), for giving as they prospered (1 Cor. 16:1-2), for praying (Acts 2:42), and for singing (1 Cor. 14:15).

Seventh, the Bible specifies the terms of membership in the church. In Acts 2:47, "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (KJV)." The Lord saves people when they hear the gospel (Rom. 10:17), believe (Mark 16:16), repent (Luke 13:3), confess (Rom. 10:10), submit to baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and live faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10).

Bible facts, if we observe them, will recreate Christ's church.

The Church, Christ's Kingdom

Some religious folk make a distinction between the church and the kingdom. A popular theological system maintains that the church is an interim institution that will continue until Christ returns to reign on earth for a thousand years. According to this system, when Christ returns to earth, he will establish his kingdom. Does the Bible teach that the church and the kingdom are separate institutions?

First, Daniel predicted that God would one day establish a kingdom that would never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44; 7:14). He also specified the period of history when this would take place (Dan. 2:31-46). The kingdom was to come in the time of the Roman Empire.

Second, Zachariah predicted the promised Branch, who was the Messiah. Zachariah said that this Branch, the seed of David, would "sit and rule upon his throne (Zach. 6:13)." Christ served as priest during the first century; therefore, he occupied the throne of David and began to rule over his kingdom in the first century.

Third, Jesus used the words *church* and *kingdom* interchangeably (Matt. 16:16-18). He identified his church and the kingdom and showed that the words *church* and *kingdom* refer to the same group of people and to the same institution.

Fourth, the language of the Hebrew writer proves that the church and kingdom are the same (Heb. 12:22-28). He says that we have come to the church of the firstborn (Christ) and that we have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:23, 28).

Fifth, when we are born of the water and the spirit, we enter the Lord's kingdom established on the Day of Pentecost after Christ's resurrection (John 3:1-5; Acts 2). At the same time and by the same process, the Lord adds us to his church (Acts 2:37-47).

Finally, prior to this Pentecost, the Bible speaks of the church and the kingdom in future terms. Christ taught, "There are some here . . . who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power (Mark 9:1)." He also said, "Upon this rock I will build my church (Matt 16:18)." Following this Pentecost, the Bible speaks of the kingdom and the church as being in existence. The Bible says that he "translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love (Col 1:13);" we receive "a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28);" and he "made us *to be* a kingdom (Rev 1:6)." Of the church Paul wrote, "He . . . gave him to be head over all things to the church which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all (Eph 1:22-23)."

What the Bible Teaches about Salvation

The salvation of man is a central teaching of the Bible. From the time that the first man sinned in the Garden, God has been seeking salvation for us all. God has acted from old to bring salvation to us. God has provided the *person* in whom we are saved, the *plan* for our salvation, and the *place* of the saved on this earth.

First, consider the **person** who saves us. At the center of our salvation is the person who is doing the saving and that person is Christ. Matthew wrote, "It is he that shall save his people from their sins (Matt 1:21)." John 3:17 says, "For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him." The greatest fact of the New Testament is that God in the form of Jesus existed in the image of man. Hebrews says of Jesus, "Having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation (Heb 5:9)." In Phil 2:5-9, Paul spoke of Christ who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross."

Second, consider the **plan** of salvation. Christ does not save haphazardly. He saves by his divine plan. The Bible nowhere teaches that Christ will save us by a plan of our own choice. Christ saves us by a plan worked out in the mind of God: "Having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will (Eph 1:5)." The good pleasure of his will, not ours. If God is to save we who are lost, it must be according to God's own plan. God's plan teaches that we must believe (Rom5:1), repent (Acts 17:30-31), confess (Rom. 10:9-10), and be baptized for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). After explaining God's plan of salvation in Acts 2:14-39, Peter urged the people present to "save yourselves from this crooked generation (Acts 2:40)." To be saved today, we must obey this plan of God for our salvation (Rom. 6:16-19).

Third, consider the **place** of salvation. When we obey God's plan of salvation (Mark 16:15-16), the Lord adds us to his church (Acts 2:47). Paul declares in Eph. 2:16 that both Jew and Gentile are reconciled in one body, which is the church (Eph. 1:20-23). Since reconciliation takes place in the body, the church, the undeniable truth is that the church is the **place** of salvation. Has the Lord added you to the body, the church, of which Christ is the savior (Eph. 5:23)?

Who saves us? Christ. What is the plan for saving us? God's plan. Where are the saved? In the body of Christ, the church.

The Keys of the Kingdom

In Matt. 16:19, our Lord made a pronouncement of far reaching significance. He told Peter, "I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." What message did Jesus intend to convey in this statement?

First, Jesus used the word *keys* in this passage in a figurative sense to denote the means of access. To give one a key was to endow one with authority. For example, during this period of history when Jesus was speaking, when the Jews elected a person to be a doctor of law, they placed in the person's hand the keys to the temple library. These keys gave the person access to the writings of the scholars and signified the person's qualifications to be a teacher of the law.

Second, when the Lord gave Peter the keys of the kingdom, he gave him the privilege of announcing the conditions on which all people would enter the kingdom. Peter used the keys on three occasions. On the Day of Pentecost in Act 2, Peter set forth and bound God's terms of forgiveness and salvation for all men (Acts 2:36-47). In Acts 10, Paul repeated these same terms and bound them on the Gentiles (Acts 10:34-48). In Acts 8, Paul set forth and bound God's plan for forgiving and restoring erring Christians (Acts 8:18-19). This plan of God for our salvation never changed at any time in all the pages of the New Testament, nor has it changed since (Jude 3). God has only this plan for all men (Acts 15:7-9).

Third, contrary to the belief of many people, the giving of the keys of the kingdom did not make Peter the head of the church. The Lord gave the power of binding and loosing to all the apostles (Matt. 18:18; John 20:22-23). The Lord did not give Peter some apostolic office that involved greater powers than the rest of the apostles. In his infinite wisdom, the Lord saw fit to bestow on Peter the honor of being the first to preach the gospel in the Christian dispensation (Acts 2).

Finally, the terms of God's salvation for us are the same as they were two thousand years ago (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; John 3:3-5). These terms, which Peter and the rest of the apostles announced and bound all over the known world, are the very same today. If we obey the Lord's will as set forth by Peter and the apostles, we will receive his salvation and be added to his church (Acts 2:47) and be "translated into the kingdom of the son of His love (Col. 1:12)." We appeal to you to obey the teaching and enter into the kingdom so richly supplied.

God Is Impartial

Some religious people teach that God will save only a group whom they call the *elect*. According to this teaching, God predestined this group to be saved and all others will be lost. The Bible teaches just the opposite to this view in Acts 10:24-35: "34 And Peter opened his mouth and said, 'Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that fears him, and works righteousness, is acceptable to him.'" God is impartial.

First, God is impartial because He desires the salvation of every responsible human being. Paul wrote of "our Saviour who would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:3-4)." Peter taught, "The Lord . . . is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9)." God does not force salvation on anyone. God draws sinners through teaching: "No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him. . . It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that has heard from the Father, and has learned, comes unto me (John 6:44-45)." Those who receive and obey the teaching of God, obtain salvation: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that hears, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life . . . (Rev 22:17)." God saves all who obey His will.

Second, God is impartial in that He has one church to which He adds all the saved (Eph. 4:4; Acts 2:47). The Lord did not establish one church for one group of us and another church for another group. Instead, he ordained that he "might reconcile them both [Jew and Gentile] in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." Both Jew and Gentile includes all people of every nation (Mark. 16:15). The Lord commanded all nations, Jew and Gentile, to submit to baptism (Mark 16:16). Paul wrote, "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks (1 Cor. 12:13)." God adds every saved person to the church (Acts 2:47).

Finally, God is impartial in that He has one plan of worship for His people to follow. All Christians are to meet on the first day of the week to take the Lord's Supper and to give as God has prospered us (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). When Christians meet, they are to sing, pray and continue "steadfast in the apostles' teaching" (Eph. 5:19; Acts 2:42). Jesus said that "the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers (John 4:23)."