

What Christ Taught

The Holy Bible

The word Bible simply means book. It is "the Book," the one book in which God has made Himself known to man. It is the one book in which God tells us our duty. If, then, we neglect the Bible, there is no possible way for us to know about God or His will for us.

The works of Nature, of course, tell us that there is a God, a Creator, for our common sense refuses to believe that the universe could have created itself, or that it could have just happened. Reasonable men of all times, with or without the Bible, have believed in the existence of a Creator. (See Romans 1:18-25). This general revelation has been given to all.

But Nature only tells us that there is a God. It does not tell us anything about Him or what He wants us to do. Only the Bible gives us this information. We say that Nature tells us that God is, but the Bible reveals who or what He is.

There are some people in the world who believe in a Creator, but who deny that He has ever revealed Himself or His will. These people are called Deists. But is their position tenable? Since there is a God, isn't it natural and reasonable to expect that He should love His creation, and especially man, the finest bit of His creative works? After God created man with such patience and care, is it possible that He then turned him loose without direction or guide? Could a careful Creator be unconcerned for the final outcome of His work? Not even a human being would act so strangely. If we worked hard and carefully with a bit of carving, we would not toss it aside when it was finished. No, since there is a Creator, we believe that He has revealed Himself and His will to men. There must also be a special revelation which God has given to man.

The Bible, from beginning to end, claims to be God's revelation. It has been so accepted by wise and good men through the centuries, and its good works are countless. The authenticity of the Bible's claim is verified by abundant revelation, God's Word to man. It was given because of His love for us, His creation. He reveals the way we should live, for we could not know this of our own wisdom. (See Jeremiah 10:23; Isaiah 55:8; Psalm 119:105; II Timothy 3:15-17; I Peter 1:23-25; Acts 7:38; Romans 3:2; 1:2).

The Divisions of the Bible

But this revelation from God has been gradual. Man was not able to receive it all at once. Thus in the Bible we have different levels or stages of revelation. We might draw this illustration: there was a time when the American nation was governed by the Articles of Confederation; that was then the law of the land. Afterward came the Constitution, which set aside the Articles of Confederation. As the nation has grown, we have had to pass laws and even to amend the Constitution to meet growing needs. At all times, we are held accountable only for the laws in effect in our time. We are not accountable today to the Articles of Confederation, for they were made invalid by the coming of the Constitution.

The Holy Bible is divided into two main divisions: the Old Testament, which was in effect until the death of Jesus Christ; and the New Testament, the revelation of God through Christ and the supreme law of God for all who have lived since Christ. It is absolutely essential that we understand the difference between these two testaments. We are judged by the law we live under, which is the New Testament. We are not judged by a law, the Old Testament, which existed before the New Testament came into effect. (See Hebrews 1:1,2; II Peter 1:21; II Timothy 3:16; I Thessalonians 2:13).

Later we shall look more closely at the Old Testament itself and see how it applied to men before the death of Christ. Then we shall study the New Testament and how it made invalid the Old Testament.

The Bible is composed of sixty-six books, thirty-nine of which are in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in

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the New. These books were written over a period of many centuries (ca. 1500 years) by different men. But since God is the Author of it all, it stands before us without contradiction or discrepancy.

How to Study the Bible

How do we go about finding what the Bible teaches on any given subject? For example, if we want to know what the Bible teaches about Grace, how could we find out? First of all, take a good concordance of the Bible and look under "Grace." You will find listed there every passage where that word occurs. If the Bible says a thing only once, that is sufficient; it need not be repeated, since God speaks from every page. However, if several passages are given, read them all and study each one in the light of the others. If you wanted to have a full account of the birth of Christ, for example, you could find part of it in Matthew and part of it in Luke; neither of these alone would give you the full account. Luke tells of the shepherds and of the angels who announced to them the glorious birth; but Matthew tells of the wise men from the East and of the star over the manger. Never read a single passage and conclude that this is the end of the teaching; look at all the passages on the same subject and consider them all together.

Further, always read the verses before and after the particular one you are studying, so that you can get the context. Many times we will be saved from erroneous interpretation by getting the whole situation in which a writer put any particular saying or subject. Consider each verse or passage in the context of the chapter in which it is located, the chapter in the context of the book of the Bible in which it is located, and the book in the context of the Old Testament or New Testament in which it is found, and the time frame or dispensation in which it is found.

Always answer some fundamental questions:

- Who is speaking?
- To whom is he speaking?
- Why, or for what purpose, is he speaking?
- Under what law or dispensation is he speaking?

Importance of Studying the Bible

The highest pursuit of the human mind is the knowledge of God. When we come to a knowledge of Him, we also know what He wants us to do. We know also how we must live to please Him. There is no other means of knowing Him truly except through the pages of His Book. The Book is open to all, and each can grasp as much as he chooses. Without the knowledge of God, there is no salvation for men; without the Bible, there is no knowledge of God; without a thoughtful and earnest study of the Bible, we can receive nothing from it. Therefore, a study of the Sacred Writings should be the first consideration of every sensible man and woman who wants to achieve an abundant and satisfying life here and the reward of everlasting life hereafter.

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The Old Testament

What It Contains

The Old Testament contains the history and religion of the Jewish people. The Jews were the people whom God chose for His special work of preparing the way for the coming of the Christ, or Messiah. The history of the Jews in the Old Testament begins with the creation of Adam and Eve, and continues through the return from the Babylonian captivity toward the close of the sixth century B.C. The Old Testament tells of the rise and fall of the Jewish national state. This history is important only because the Jews had been chosen by God for a holy work. The last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, was written about 430 B.C.

Not only does the Old Testament give the history of the Jews, but also their religion. This religion was contained in the Law of Moses, given by God through Moses from Mount Sinai. This law contained the Ten Commandments and many detailed commandments to govern religious and social life.

The first five (of the thirty-nine) books of the Old Testament, which Jews call the Torah, contain this law of Moses, along with many historical facts before and immediately following its delivery to Moses. The next twelve books contain the history of the Jews from the time after the law was given until the return from the Babylonian captivity. The next five books, often called Wisdom literature or poetry, are the religious drama, poetry, and literature of the Jews, expressing faith, penitence, praise, etc. of those who lived under the Law. The last seventeen books embrace the warnings and visions of the Jewish prophets. These are often divided into major prophets and minor prophets. Thus we have five chief divisions of the Old Testament: law, five books; history, twelve books; poetry, five books; major prophets, five books; and minor prophets, twelve books.

Its Place in Religious History

From its contents as outlined above, we readily see that the Old Testament did not present itself as a way of universal salvation. It was for the Jews and about the Jews. Other nations were not included in its history except at those points where they touched the Jewish nation. God chose the Jews as the nation through which the Christ should come, and the law of Moses in the Old Testament was the means of preparing them to bring Him forth. In other words, the Jews were God's appointed servant to keep true religion alive until the coming of the Christ or Messiah (the Anointed One).

Consider carefully Galatians 3:23-24. This passage clearly teaches that the law of Moses was a temporary arrangement until a permanent way could be established through Christ. The law was a **schoolmaster**, or as the word here literally means an **escort**. This refers to a household slave who would escort the small children to school, to see that they arrived safely. They were called the **pedagogues** or "those who led the children." This is the word used here. The law was the escort providing safe journey to the true Teacher, Jesus Christ.

See also Galatians 4:3-6. This compares the law of Moses with the rules which the parents lay down for the small child. The gospel of Christ is here compared with the freedom of the adult. The rules placed upon the child are for his guidance until he reaches maturity. When maturity is reached, the rules are taken away. The Old Testament was given to govern the child, but we became mature with the work of Christ.

Deuteronomy 18:17-20 is a unique passage in all religious literature. Moses himself looks forward to the time when the Anointed Prophet of God shall come. Moses anticipates that the law being given through him will be abrogated or done away.

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When Taken Away

When was this old law of Moses taken away? Notice in Galatians 4:4 that Jesus Himself was born under the law. The law was still in effect when Christ came. It remained in effect until He finished His work and established a new way. When was His work finished? He Himself tells us. Read John 19:30. See Colossians 2:14. Paul writes that this old law was "blotted out" being "nailed to the cross." Thus the Old Testament served its purpose and was then made invalid. Note Ephesians 2:15. The law was given in the first place to lead toward Christ, and when Christ did His redemptive work on the cross, its mission was accomplished. When Christ died, His work was finished, and the old law was thereby "nailed to the cross." No one since the death of Christ has been under the Old Testament law. Many religious teachers today try to make the Old Testament binding upon us, advising us to keep Saturday, or the Sabbath, as a holy day, etc. But Paul's entire books of Galatians and Romans were written to show that under Christ as our Savior, we are no longer under the law. Consider Galatians 5:1. This is a plea not to return to the bondage of the old law of Moses and an admonition to stand fast in the freedom in Christ.

Why Taken Away

Why was the Old Testament law of Moses taken away? It had in Christ fulfilled its purpose. The law contained two basic, fundamental demands. First, the law demanded a perfect life. "Be ye holy, even as I am holy" is a constant demand throughout the Scriptures. Yet another brute face of Scripture is that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). James (2:10) affirms that "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." No one has met this demand of the law. Secondly, failing a perfect life, the law demanded a perfect sacrifice. The constant emphasis is that the sacrifice for sin be without spot or blemish. This creates another dilemma. "...It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Only One could and did meet the demands of the law. Jesus lived a sinless life and then offered Himself as the only perfect sacrifice for sin. Christ thus fulfilled the law.

Our Use of It Today

If the Old Testament became inactive as a codification of law at the death of Christ, why do we read and study it today? We have already seen that the Old Testament provides us with religious history and background which we cannot find anywhere else. This helps us immeasurably to understand the New Testament. It reveals the eternal purpose of God, as He worked toward the coming of Christ from the beginning. We can see how He dealt with people in the past, and all this can be an example to us. Note carefully I Corinthians 10:1-12, especially verse 11. We find inspiration in reading what the great men of God in the past had to say, even though they were living under a different law. David, for example, was a man of faith and courage in the Lord, and his faith can renew faith in us. We are not told to offer animal sacrifices to God as David was, but we do believe in the same God. Meditate on Romans 4, especially verses 23-24. Examine Romans 15:4.

In summary, then: The Old Testament was given for a specific purpose and for a limited time and people. When the fullness of time came, it ceased to be effective as commandments. In reading and studying it, however, we do learn history, find inspiration, and receive instructive examples in righteousness.

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The New Testament

Its Divisions

The New Testament is much shorter than the Old. It contains only twenty-seven books, and most of the books are short enough to be read at a single sitting; yet the New Testament contains all that we need for salvation. The first four books of the New Testament we call **Gospels**, because they tell us the good news of the life of Jesus Christ. They tell us of His virgin birth, His baptism, temptation, ministry of teaching and miracles, of His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to the Father. These four books, or biographies, relate the account of His life in a little different way, but each tells the same glad news of God becoming man that He might lift man upward toward Himself. Except for a few references in other parts of the Bible, all that we know of the life of Jesus is contained in these four Gospels.

The second division of the New Testament is composed of only one book. It takes up right where the four Gospels leave off. The book of **Acts of Apostles** begins with the ascension of Christ and follows the history of the early church as it tried to carry out His commission. The book of **Acts** tells how men were converted to Christ, how the church sent out missionaries to teach that sinners might be converted, and of the heroic evangelistic labors of the apostle Paul. Thus the four Gospels tell us about what "Jesus began both to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1), and the book of **Acts** tells us what Jesus continued to do and to teach through the Holy Spirit, His apostles, and His disciples, or church, to bring men and women to Him.

The third division of the New Testament is the largest of all, composed of twenty-one books. These are epistles, or letters, of instruction in the Christian faith; some of them were written to the churches, some to individuals. Paul himself wrote thirteen of these epistles, perhaps another, James one, Peter two, John three, and Jude one. All of these letters teach us the meaning of the Christian life and the nature and work of the church.

The last division of the New Testament is composed of a single book, the book of **Revelation**. This was written by the apostle John while he was exiled on the island of Patmos; it is a vision of some things that were to happen to the church and of its final victory and exaltation. This book contains much practical instruction to the church and glorifies the Christian hope; much of it is very difficult to interpret, as are all prophecies of future events. However, none of these obscure passages pertain to matters of salvation.

Thus we have the four main divisions of the New Testament. In a very general way we can say this: if you want to know about the life and teaching of Jesus, look in the four Gospels; if you want to know how to live the Christian life, and how the church should live and work, read the letters; if you want to be inspired with faith in the victory of the church and with the hope of eternal blessedness, read **Revelation**. This statement is, of course, too broad to hold true in every case, but it is useful in helping us to see the primary function of each division of the New Testament.

Its Place in Religious History

The Old Testament was given to the Jews for a certain purpose and when this purpose was accomplished, it was taken away. This old law was "nailed to the cross," and a new law came into being. See Jeremiah 31:31 for the prophecy that a new and different covenant would be given by God. That prophecy was written by a man who was under the law of Moses, but who saw through inspiration that that law would be taken away and a new one given by God. See Hebrews 9:13-18. This passage shows that without the shedding of blood no testament is effective. The law of Moses was made effective, according to this passage, by the sprinkling of the blood of bulls and goats. The New Testament was made effective by the shedding of the blood of Christ.

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The New Testament could not have been in force before the death of the testator, but when it became effective, it made void all previous testaments or wills.

But then we ask, "How long shall the New Testament remain?" "Shall we look for another testament to come and take it away as it took away the law before it?" "Has another testament already come to take it away or to modify it?" In other words, we know that it made all others void, but will another in turn make it also void?

Roman Catholicism, for example, claims to have the authority to speak for God. The pope in his official capacity claims to be infallible in matters of faith and morals. The New Testament to Roman Catholics is not final, for the Roman Church goes on "revealing God's will" year after year. Catholicism has therefore declared many doctrines that are unknown to and not mentioned in the New Testament. This theory of papal infallibility, or "apostolic succession," or the "historic episcopate" is also characteristic of many "mainline" denominations in Orthodoxy and Protestantism. Shall we receive these continuing or new revelations, or shall we hold that the New Testament is the final and full revelation or authority, and therefore an all-sufficient rule of faith and practice?

There have been many other claims to revelation since the New Testament was given. For example, Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormons or Latter Day Saints, claimed to have been visited by an angel who told him where to find certain tablets on which were written revelations not yet brought to light. Smith claimed to have taken and translated these tablets, thus bringing the world the **Book of Mormon**.

An even more prevalent claim to final authority today is that either human reason or the gamut of human emotions is the only arbiter of religious authority. Either what appeals to human reason or what makes one "feel" good is the ultimate court of appeal. The human being as such is the measure of all things. What shall we say of such claims? Does the New Testament suggest that other revelations from God will follow, or does it present itself as the final authority from God for all time?

Study carefully Galatians 1:8-9. Paul was an apostle, yet he wrote that if "we" (the apostles) preach any other Gospel than that already revealed, let "us" (the apostles) be accursed. Notice that even the apostle Paul did not claim the authority to add to the simple Gospel. If the "successors of the apostles" preach any other Gospel than that set forth in the New Testament, let them be accursed. This passage also says that even if an angel from heaven should bring any other Gospel, he, too, should be accursed. Paul continues "As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:9). The New Testament presents to us the simple, final Gospel which was sealed with the blood of the Son of God. Nothing higher or more precious could be given. Why would not the testament brought in by the death of Christ be sufficient for all time? What possible act could accompany any other revelation to sanctify it above the New Testament which itself is sanctified by the Son of God?

See now Jude 3. What is meant here by "the faith"? Obviously the Christian faith which the apostles were preaching. What is meant here by "once for all"? All that it can mean is that the Gospel through Christ, preached by the apostles and revealed in the New Testament, is given for all time and that no further revelation can be expected. Any other claim to revelation is spurious and should be rejected. The New Testament is sufficient to bring us to Christ, enable us to abide in Him, and to lead us to heaven to live eternally with Him.

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The New Testament And Human Creeds

Departure from the New Testament

The new Testament presents itself as the final authority from God. Paul said that any other Gospel, whatever its source, should be accursed as a perversion (Galatians 1:8-9), and Jude said that "the faith [was] once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

The New Testament itself foretold a "falling away" from this pure Gospel. According to the New Testament, the church itself would slip into false doctrines and erroneous practices. Paul told the elders of the Ephesian church in Acts 20:29-32, that after his leaving them, "wolves" would come in among the flock to destroy, and that from among themselves, i.e. the eldership itself, false teachers would rise up to draw away disciples after them. Each departure from New Testament teaching arose from within the church itself, and just as Paul said that it would, from within the leadership of the churches. I Timothy 4:1-3 is more explicit as to some aspects, or false doctrines, of this "falling away." He wrote that some characteristic false teachings would be the forbidding of marriage and forbidding to eat meats.

Our space here does not permit us to trace the historical development of this "falling away" as one departure led to another, and one wresting of authority established the way for another such wresting. This can be traced in any reputable volume of church history. You readily will see, however, that these prophecies of a "falling away" did not go unfulfilled if you will compare the simplicity of New Testament teaching with the involved and complex doctrines and practices of Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, or Protestantism today.

In the writings of Ignatius of Antioch, who lived shortly after the apostles, we find strong traces of a priestly and episcopal hierarchy, or "clergy system," developing which were unknown to the New Testament. This indeed was the first sign of the "falling away," i.e. the usurping of power by certain elders who called themselves "Bishops" in a sense never intended. This tendency toward the grasping of power continued, and with the conversion of Emperor Constantine in A.D. 315, it was much accelerated. A centralized hierarchy, with control over all the local churches, deliberately patterned after the political structure of the Roman empire, quickly developed. As early as A.D. 325 Constantine called a general council of churchmen to meet at Nicea to determine what should be the "official" doctrine of the "Trinity." The "faith once for all delivered" (Jude 3) needed no such council of men to bring further revelation.

From this time onward error grew by leaps and bounds, fed by the notion that the church can reveal new or fuller teachings of God, or amend or modify what previously has been taught. A "Great Schism" in A.D. 1054 split Christendom into the Greek, Eastern, or Orthodox, dominant in the East, and the Latin, Roman, or Catholic, dominant in the West. It was not, however, until A.D. 1871 that the doctrine of papal infallibility was enunciated in Rome. This pronouncement was the culmination of that long process of the grasping of power by men which began shortly after the death of the apostles and which Paul himself had prophesied.

The Roman hierarchy today teaches and practices many things that are unknown or contrary to the New Testament. They have, among other things, created a hierarchal structure that puts man in the place of Jesus Christ as mediator between God and man; they have substituted the pouring or sprinkling of water on the head for New Testament immersion; they have substituted the sprinkling of babies for the New Testament practice of the immersion of believers; they have substituted a weird and superstitious notion (Transubstantiation) about the Lord's Supper for the beautiful and simple memorial which Christ Himself made it. These are only a few examples of the departures from the New Testament. But our purpose here is

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not to discuss the particular tenets, but to see how there was a departure from the New Testament as the absolute authority in religion. When the religious hierarchy took to itself the authority to legislate and enunciate doctrines, all the strange pagan practices so evident today became possible.

Partial Return to the New Testament by Reformation

In A.D. 1517 Martin Luther, a fearlessly bold Dominican monk of Wittenberg, Germany, challenged the Roman hierarchy with ninety-five theses which he wrote and tacked up in a public place. The whole Roman hierarchy and membership was rocked. The Renaissance had stirred men's minds to seek truth and had turned their efforts and interest to the languages of the past, Greek and Hebrew among them. This new learning had made thoughtful men wonder about the superstitions and paganism that had come into Christianity. The popes for centuries had been so tyrannical that civil rulers were already rebellious and their peoples restless. Thus Luther came at a good time, as new light had already prepared the way by undermining Roman darkness. The other thoughtful men before him had stood against the evils of Romanism, but they were overcome because the times were not ready for their message.

Luther did a marvelous work in challenging the glaring evils of the existent system, but he did not go all the way. Instead of leaving Romanism entirely and going all the way back to the New Testament, he tried simply to reform the more vicious of the evils. Luther did not even question many of the unscriptural and antiscritural practices which had developed. For example, Luther kept infant sprinkling, rather than returning to the New Testament way of immersing repentant believers. He took the first leap and it was for others to carry through. Luther was a reformer of the worst evils of Romanism, but he was not a restorer of the original Gospel made know in the New Testament, which Paul said was the only Gospel.

Then came other reformers, such as Henry VIII, Calvin, Knox, Zwingli, Wesley, and the others. Each of these in turn, as did Luther, picked out the glaring flaws in Romanism and in other reformed groups. But they did not do a thorough job of returning to "the faith once for all delivered unto the saints." Each in turn wrote his creed, catechism, book of discipline, or manual, and each retained practices which were unknown to the New Testament.

Return to the New Testament by Restoration

During the 19th century there arose a group of men in various parts of the world, and at first working independently of each other, who sought to go behind the heresies of the prior centuries and to restore the original church by returning to the New Testament. They saw that denominationalism was wrong, not just for this or that particular teaching, but in the whole assumption by each denomination of authority to go beyond the Word of God. They insisted that if we preach and teach what the apostles preached and taught, it would produce simply Christians now as it did then. Such a Gospel preached and taught clearly will not establish a denomination, sect, or cult, but will restore the original church of the New Testament.

To summarize: There was an exponential departure from the New Testament as the sole and supreme authority in religion. This led to such obvious evils and falsities that thinking men had to rebel. The Protestant Reformation was a partial return to the New Testament, but it still held to many false doctrines and practices, and over time produced others of its own. The full return to the New Testament was the work of the Restoration movement. And this is a work which must be done anew by each succeeding generation. The key to restoration is simply for each individual to obey the gospel of Christ, and to adhere to the New Testament as the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice for one's life.

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Conversion

What is Conversion

What is conversion? What must an individual do in order to be converted? Men have given many different answers to these questions. God has given only one answer. We know that one cannot convert oneself through education or scientific learning, but that one must be converted by God. We will let the New Testament speak for itself, as it alone is able to speak with authority.

But first let us look at some of the doctrines of men about conversion, that we may the better appreciate the importance of knowing the New Testament way. In examining these doctrines, we do not mean to cast aspersions on anyone or to ridicule any person's religion; we intend only to show how human judgment can err when it leaves the Word of God.

First, most of the "Holiness" groups teach that one must "pray through" to conversion. They teach that a sinner must pray until God sends the Holy Spirit to the person. When the Holy Spirit comes, one will have a strange **feeling** inside that assures that one is "saved." Is this the teaching of the New Testament?

Another doctrine of conversion is widely taught by many Protestant groups. They teach that one is converted by simply believing in Jesus Christ. That is, a sinner does nothing but believe, and through this believing alone one is saved. As a sample of this widely taught doctrine, here is an excerpt from a tract by B. H. Hilliard, of Lockland, Ohio: "The Philippian jailer was saved by believing on Christ, and after being saved was baptized," (p. 8, "Salvation Full and Complete"). Most Protestant groups today are teaching the doctrine of conversion expressed in that quotation, i.e. that individuals are converted or saved by **faith alone**, and that baptism has nothing to do with conversion. Is this the teaching of the New Testament?

Read carefully the following Scriptures and see what light they shed on the above mentioned doctrines of men: Mark 16:16; James 2:14-26; Romans 1:16; 10:13-17; 6:17.

From a careful reading of these passages, you can answer the following questions: Is believing in Jesus **all** that is required for conversion? Is faith without works valid? What is God's power to save? How is this power taken hold of, or appropriated, by an individual? Does one "pray through" to salvation, or does one hear the Gospel, believe it, and obey it? From these passages would you not say that when the New Testament speaks of belief, it also implies the faith, trust, and commitment, or works of obedience that go with believing?

Now, read carefully John 3:1-10. This passage tells us what Jesus taught about conversion. Conversion is called a "new birth." Conversion is the change in an individual's inner life which God brings about when one believes and obeys the divine commands. In other words, one believes and obeys the simple commands of God, and God changes or converts one's heart, or brings about the new birth. Notice in verse 3 that Jesus says an individual must be born again. Jesus explains in verse 5 how this is done, i.e. "born of water and of the Spirit." "Water" in this verse can mean only baptism in water. "Spirit" means the Holy Spirit. When we believe and obey the simple command to be baptized in water, the Holy Spirit works the inner change in us which we could not work upon ourselves, thus born of water and of the Spirit. Thus conversion is a cooperative act of the individual and God. One yields to the will of God by believing and obeying His command to be baptized, and God works on the heart that is yielded to Him. God alone can work this change within a person, but God will not do so until one yields as clay in the hand of the potter. See I Peter 3:21 for the necessity of baptism in the plan of salvation. From Jesus' words in John 3:5, would you say that faith without baptism is sufficient for conversion? By this same verse, would you say that the new birth comes by "praying through?"

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New Testament Examples of Conversion

The book of Acts is the book of conversions. Acts reveals how the early church preached and made converts to Christ. It tells simply and clearly what the early church preached and what sinners believed and obeyed. These sinners were converted by the power of the Gospel. Let us study these examples of conversion one by one, assured that whatever converted men and women in that day will also convert them now. Remember that the New Testament is the only authority in this matter. When we restore the teaching of Christ and His apostles concerning conversion, we will be well on the way also to restoring the church as it was in the days of the apostles.

1. Conversion of 3000 on Pentecost. Acts 2:1-39. Notice particularly verses 37 and 38. The people asked what they should do and were told to repent and to be baptized for the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.
2. Conversion of the Samaritans. Acts 8:5-13. See that Philip preached the Gospel of Christ to the people. They believed it and were baptized. Simon the sorcerer also believed and was baptized.
3. Conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. Acts 8:26-39. Notice the same pattern of obedience here. Philip preached "Jesus," the eunuch believed; they came to water; they both went down into the water for the baptism; and they both came up out of the water.
4. Conversion of Cornelius and his household. Acts 10:1-5, 21-48. The same facts of obedience stand out: Peter preached the Gospel; they believed it and were baptized.
5. Conversion of the Philippian jailer. Acts 16:25-33. Again, the Word of the Lord was preached, and those who heard were baptized the same hour of the night. See that Paul told the jailer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Did Paul mean that believing by itself, or faith alone, would save the jailer? Or did he mean that faith which embraces obedience? He must have included obedience, for the jailer and his household were baptized the same hour. They did not wait until the next day or the next week as though it were an optional matter. They went immediately as though it were urgent.
6. Conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Acts 22:1-16. Observe what Saul was doing when the preacher came to him. He was praying. The preacher did not tell him to go on praying until he "prayed through" and had a "feeling" of forgiveness; he told him to get up and be baptized and wash away his sins. Notice verse 16. Thus our sins are not forgiven through prayer or through faith only, but through these and baptism. Baptism is an expression, or work, of faith, and without baptism, faith is dead. Faith alone is nothing; faith through obedience justifies.

Summary: The New Testament teaches that God or the Holy Spirit changes the heart of an individual if one will yield in faith and obedience. This obedience involves faith and trust in Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior and Lord of one's life, repentance from sins, acknowledgment or confession of Jesus as the Christ, the one and only Son of the one true and living God, and baptism for the remission of sins. This is the simple New Testament way to make Christians. The New Testament reveals no other way. Paul said that any other Gospel should be accursed. Study Galatians 1:8,9.

Assurance of Salvation

We require a "blessed assurance" of our salvation. Again the doctrines of men are many. Many claim that **predestination** of the individual by God, and a conviction, or "feeling," that one is among the "elect" is the assurance. Similarly, the claim is made that **perception**, or "feeling," is the assurance given those who "only believe," or "pray through." A very popular doctrine today is that personal **performance** or **production** provides the assurance. This is expressed by many who, standing by the side of a coffin, state that if the dead

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person "doesn't get to heaven, nobody will." None of the above is able to provide adequate assurance of salvation. Only the **promise** of God Himself can provide positive assurance of salvation. Only when God Himself promises "ye shall be saved," can we know that we are saved.

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Baptism

Its Meaning

Baptism is a necessary part of conversion. God alone converts the heart of man through the power of His Holy Spirit, but one must yield oneself to God through obeying His command to be immersed in water. Let us be reminded, however, that to be Scriptural, baptism must be preceded by faith and repentance.

What, then, is the meaning of baptism? Is there any power in the water itself, or is the water holy? Certainly not; the water of baptism is like all other water. Is there any power in the act itself? Certainly not; an animal can be dipped into the water in the manner of baptism, but this does not constitute a Scriptural baptism. Baptism is not a magical rite, automatically bestowing blessings in and of itself. Its value lies in the fact that it is an act of faith, i.e. one believes the commands of God and obeys. See I Peter 3:21. This passage tells us that we are saved by baptism, but that baptism is not just the outward act, i.e. "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God." If we are baptized because God has commanded it, then our conscience is answering in a beautiful way to His command, and baptism is the seal of our faith in Him. The power of baptism is not in the water or in the act itself; the power is in our obedience to God through faith. The sprinkling of babies, therefore, is contrary to the Scriptural teaching about baptism, for there is no answer from the child's conscience "toward God." Infant sprinkling implies that the act itself has magical power to work some good even without the child's inward response. This is a doctrine of legalism, or depending on our works, acts, or deeds themselves for salvation.

Baptism is spoken of as a "new birth." See John 3:1-10. Verse 5 says that we must "be born of water and of the Spirit." When we yield to the command of God and are immersed in water, we receive "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38), to change the inner man, or to produce a new creature in Jesus Christ. Since birth involves entrance into a family, we may say that baptism brings us into the spiritual family of God, that through baptism we become children of God. So baptism changes our relationship, making us children of God; and it changes our inward being, making us or helping us to grow to be like our Father.

Notice also in this passage that through baptism we come into the "kingdom of God." The kingdom of God is simply the church. It is composed of all those who have accepted God as King, and who have committed themselves to obey His commands. When we obey Him in baptism, we are saying in effect: "Speak, O King, thy subject will be loyal to obey." Thereby we enter into the kingdom, the church, the body of Christ, the family of God.

Baptism also means, "by this act I express my faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ." Every time a sinner is baptized, he or she re-enacts the crucial facts of the gospel, i.e. the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. See I Corinthians 15:1-4. Without these facts, we would have no faith in Jesus as Savior; we would have no hope of our own final resurrection from the grave. Our baptism looks backward to Christ's suffering, death, burial, and resurrection, and forward to our rising with Him in the last day. See Romans 6:1-9. Paul here points out that we die to sin, i.e. we repent and turn away from sin, we are buried in the water as Christ was buried in the tomb, we are raised from the water as Christ was raised on the third day by the power of God. Note in this passage also that Paul is careful to show that baptism is not just the outward form, but also the inward change. He says that we rise from the water to "walk in newness of life." We are to become new creatures and are to live a new life. So whether we speak of baptism as a new birth or as a burial and resurrection, we still have the outward form and the inward change through the power of God. Through baptism we become "babes in Christ," new creatures, subjects in His kingdom, members of His body, the church. All these terms mean that we must be spiritual within as well as correct without. See also Colossians 2:12.

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What promises does God offer to those who will be truly or Scripturally baptized? He promises first of all to forgive, remit, or wash away all our sins. See Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16.

Notice Romans 6:17. Paul says that we are made "free from sin" when we obey from the heart "that form of doctrine" that he preached. In I Corinthians 15:3, he says that the facts of that doctrine are the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We cannot literally obey these facts, but we can obey what Paul calls "that form of doctrine." We can die to sin, be buried in water, and be raised. This is a form or representation of the facts of the gospel. When we obey this form from the heart, we are made "free from sin." I John 1:7 teaches that "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Where do we find the blood of Christ except in His death where it was shed? See Romans 6:3.

Not only does God promise forgiveness of sins through baptism, but also to send us the Holy Spirit to bring about a moral and spiritual change in us. Acts 2:38 promises the "gift of the Holy Spirit" to those who will "repent and be baptized for the remission of sins." The Holy Spirit who helps us live the Christian life is a gift from God; He is a reward for our obedience to Him in baptism. See Acts 5:32.

Its "Mode"

There are three modes or methods of "baptizing" in common practice today, i.e. sprinkling, pouring, and immersion. Ephesians 4:4,5 teaches that there is but "one baptism." If one mode is right, the other two are wrong. No two of them can be right. The only one that can be right is the one that God wants and has commanded in the New Testament.

Such figures of speech as "buried with him by baptism into death" (Romans 6:4) and "planted together in the likeness of his death" (Romans 6:5) certainly indicate a covering in water, a submerging, dipping, plunging, or immersion. We never speak of burying anything by sprinkling or pouring earth upon it. Notice also the graphic illustrations in the following passages. Jesus "came up out of the water" after His baptism (Mark 1:10). "They went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water..." (Acts 8:38,39). There would have been no need to go down into the water if water were simply to be sprinkled or poured on the head. John 3:23 notes that John the Baptist was baptizing in a certain place "for there was much water there." Why did he want "much water" if a half pint or quart would be sufficient?

The Greek word has been transliterated into the English language as "baptize" or "baptism." When the word is properly translated, rather than merely transliterated, it can only be translated as "immerse" or "immersion," "dip" or "dipping," "plunge" or "plunging." Immersion was the "mode" of Jesus' baptism, the "mode" taught by the apostles, and the "mode" practiced by the early church. The adoption of sprinkling or pouring as a substitute was a later departure from the New Testament authority or teaching. Immersion is crucifixion with Christ, the death and burial of the old man of sin, that the new creature may rise to walk in newness of life. Baptism is not partial or fractional; it is a total cleansing, a complete change. In immersion we yield ourselves to the power of God so that He may create in us a new heart and renew a right spirit within us.

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The Church: Its Nature, Purpose, And Name

Its Nature

We come into Christ (Galatians 3:27) and are born into the family of God (John 3:5) through baptism. Without baptism there is no conversion, and without it there is no remission of sins for the alien sinner. Thus the very same act which brings us remission of sins also brings us into Christ, or into God's family, or into the church. According to the New Testament, there is no such things as "being saved" and then deciding whether or not we will "join a church," or deciding "which church" we will join. To be saved through obedience to Christ is also to become a member of His church.

How then shall we define the church of the New Testament? Can we not agree on a definition something like this: "The church is the **automatic** fellowship of all those who have obeyed from the heart the gospel of Christ?" We use the word "automatic" because the same act of coming into the church is a natural result or an automatic consequence of our obedience. We may say that the church is simply all the people everywhere who have been saved from past sins through obeying the gospel of Christ. A local church is any group of penitent, or repentant, immersed believers in Jesus Christ.

The church then is not a sect, cult, or denomination. It was not founded, nor is it regulated, by any human being or group. The church was built by Jesus Christ (Cf. Matthew 16:18). It was purchased with His blood (Cf. Acts 20:28). He is its Head (Cf. Colossians 1:18). He is its Savior (Cf. Ephesians 5:23). It is the household or family of God (Cf. I Timothy 3:15). Christ founded only one church and as the church is His body, there can be only one church. See Ephesians 4:4; I Corinthians 12:13. As there is but one Christ, there is but one way of salvation. All who obey that one way are added to the church. The church is composed of all those everywhere who have heard the gospel, believed in Jesus Christ, repented of sins, confessed Christ as Savior and Lord, and who have been buried in water in His Name for the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. When we do these, we are converted and are "added" to the church by the Lord Himself (Cf. Acts 2:47).

Its Purpose

The church has three broad duties. We cannot be a Scriptural church without striving sincerely and zealously to perform these functions.

1. The church is to preach and teach the gospel to all persons everywhere. The great commission was given to the apostles (Cf. Matthew 28:18-20), and through them to the disciples of all time (Cf. II Timothy 2:2). The book of Acts gives the record of how the early church went about carrying out this commission, teaching the gospel to all nations and peoples. One of the requirements of the elders of the church is that they be "apt to teach" (Cf. I Timothy 3:2). The church is called "the pillar and ground of the truth" (I Timothy 3:15). That is, the truth of the gospel is entrusted to the church; the church is its support on the earth. The gospel is God's power to save (Cf. Romans 1:16), and this power is not effective until individuals understand it. The work of bringing persons to understand the gospel is up to the church.

II Corinthians 4:7 tells us that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels." That is, the treasure of the gospel is in earthen or human hands. Recall now from your study of conversions in the New Testament how this worked out. When an angel appeared to Cornelius (Cf. Acts 10), he did not preach the gospel to him; he rather told him to fetch Simon Peter from Joppa and that he would preach the gospel to him. The angel could have preached the gospel; but this treasure is now committed to the human church, not

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to angels. When the Lord Himself appeared to Saul on the Damascus road (Cf. Acts 22), He did not tell him what to do to be saved despite Saul's tearful plea, "What shall I do, Lord?" Jesus left the preaching of the gospel to Ananias, the earthen vessel. So the gospel is not spread by angels or by God Himself, but is spread by the church, which is the pillar and ground of the truth.

2. The church is to care for the poor. This is in a way a part of its teaching duty, as our relief of suffering and need is a teaching of what the spirit of Christ means. Caring for the poor has always been a special concern with God and has always been a religious duty, whether under the law of Moses or the gospel of Christ. Acts 6 tells how the Jerusalem church appointed seven men for the special work of caring for the tables of the poor. Paul informs us in Galatians 2:10 that the one thing that the Jewish brethren stressed that he should remember in his work was the care of the poor. James (1:27) in defining "pure religion," specifies "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." On and on we might go with Scriptures, showing that the relief of the poor is a special and broad duty of the church of Christ. We cannot be a church according to the New Testament without seeking to manifest the spirit of Christ in this way.
3. The church is to provide fellowship. No one can long be a Christian by oneself. It is not good for a person to be alone physically, socially, or spiritually. So the human family is given for day to day companionship. The church is given for fuller spiritual companionship. Fellowship includes all the "togetherness" of the church, expressed in the assembly around the Lord's table, all means of Christian education and nurture, cooperative work for Christ, Christian association, brotherly sympathy and ministry in times of distress and need. The church is a family and should be characterized by the closeness of brothers and sisters under the tender care of one Father. "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Romans 12:15). This is a beautiful expression of the fellowship within the church. This duty of the church is so large and at the same time so obvious, that we will content ourselves with this brief mention of it.

Its Name

In New Testament times, of course, there was only one church and no name was needed to distinguish it from other groups. Christians could be referred to simply as "the church," "the way," "the believers," "the disciples," etc. The term "disciples" is the more frequent designation in the New Testament. This word means a student, learner, or follower. "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch," (Acts 11:26). "Christians" was the name which appears to be the fulfillment of the predictive prophecy in Isaiah 56:5.

A number of names, however, are used in the New Testament in reference to the church. They were surely not intended as dogmatic or denominational names. These were rather descriptive terms used about the church. We certainly should use one of these terms from the New Testament, rather than some name of human invention or in honor of some human being, doctrine, event, or place. Consider also the fact that the church is married to Christ and naturally should wear His name and so do honor to the bridegroom. See Romans 7:4; II Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 19:7.

Notice the following names of the church used in the New Testament: Church of God, I Corinthians 1:2; II Corinthians 1:1; I Timothy 3:15; Body of Christ, Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 5:23, etc.; Church of the Lord, Acts 20:8; Churches of Christ, Romans 16:16 [if all were spoken of as "all the churches of Christ," would that not be a most fitting name for one of the churches of Christ, i.e. a church of Christ?]; Matthew 16:18.

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The Church: Its Government

Historical Note

Common sense and experience teach us that any organization composed of human beings, whether a school, a club, or a nation, must have some type of ruling board or government with authority to map out a **program** of action for the organization and to maintain **discipline** and **order** within it. The church is no exception. In the case of the church, however, we are not dependent simply on common sense and experience. The New Testament has made very clear the fact that the church must have its government and has revealed what that government must be and how it should function. The religious world is greatly divided in this matter of church government. This division has not come over what the New Testament says, but is the result of a process of historical development which you may trace in any standard text on church history.

The first departure from the truth of the New Testament was in this doctrine of church polity or church government. Some ambitious men grasped powers to themselves which the Scriptures had not given. They assumed the authority to speak for many churches and usurped power never intended for them. This process grew worse with the passing centuries, until the "bishop" in Rome finally grasped all authority for the church everywhere. The Reformation, instead of making a clean breast of the entire thing and returning to the original simplicity of the New Testament government, was largely content to change the perverted system here and there. Protestantism patched and repatched, instead of rejecting the whole error and returning to the original. Many denominations have simply a modified version of the Roman Catholic government. What is required is a restoration of the pure and simple apostolic way revealed in the New Testament.

Church Government of the New Testament

The church revealed in the New Testament is a spiritual kingdom or theocracy, i.e. governed by God. In the beginning each congregation governed itself, directly responsible to its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. This was "local autonomy in the Lord." Each was autonomous and independent with no interference or dictation from any other congregation or congregations. One congregation was spiritually as important as any other, regardless of size or position. There was extensive cooperation among congregations. But there is no inkling in the New Testament that one congregation had more **authority** than another or any authority over another. The local church in the New Testament is the only organizational expression of the kingdom of God upon earth. Each governed itself and allowed others to do the same. The idea that one man or group can have authority over a number of congregations is entirely foreign to the New Testament. Such an idea is simply a hang-over from the "falling away."

Names by Which the Elder is Called

Many denominations today, following the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox lead, make a distinction between the "elder," "presbyter," or "priest," and the "bishop." They make the former an officer in the local congregation and the bishop an officer over several congregations in the area or diocese. This distinction is unknown to the Scriptures, which teach clearly that both are one and the same person. They are just two different names for the same man.

The New Testament uses the terms interchangeably. See Titus 1:5-7. Titus is here told to ordain **elders** in every city and is then told that the **bishop** ["overseer," "episcopos"] must be blameless. See also Acts 20:17-

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28. In verse 17 we are told that Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church. In verse 28 Paul, speaking to these **elders**, calls them **bishops** [or overseers, or episcopates]. Thus an elder is a bishop, and a bishop is an elder. Whatever name you call him, he is an officer in a local congregation and has no authority outside the church which he was ordained to share in ruling.

Not only is the elder called bishop; he is called by other names in the New Testament. "Elder," of course, refers to his maturity in the gospel. He is no beginner, no novice. The Greek word in the original, from which "elder" is translated, is "presbuteros." This is sometimes transliterated into our English word "presbyter." This word has been further shortened into our English word "priest." See I Timothy 4:4 in the "Authorized Version," or "King James Version." The "presbytery" is the "body of elders." Thus "elder" and "presbyter" are exactly the same word, coming to us from two languages. Both refer to the man's maturity in the faith.

As to his work, the elder is called an "overseer," for he is to supervise or oversee the work of the church. The Greek word from which "overseer" is translated is "episcopos." This word also has been transliterated into our English words "episcopal" or "episcopate." The Latin derivative of the same word is "bishop." So whether we call him an overseer, episcopate, or bishop, we are referring to his work of supervising the life of the local church. We have three words only because of the three languages involved.

Notice in Acts 20:28 that the elders are to "take heed . . . to all the flock . . . to feed the church" (AV or KJV), to "be **shepherds** of the church" (NIV). This applies to their teaching of the Word of God to the church. Those who feed the flock are shepherds. The Latin derivative for shepherd is "pastor." This word too has been transliterated directly into our English word "pastor." Nowhere in the New Testament is this word "pastor" used in reference to the preacher, minister or evangelist. Shepherd or pastor is always used to refer to the elder. See Ephesians 4:11; I Peter 5:1-3.

Thus we may Scripturally call the governing officers of the local church elders, presbyters, overseers, bishops, episcopates, shepherds, or pastors. They are the only government for the church revealed in the New Testament. Whatsoever is more than this, or other than this, is from men. Deacons, or servants, are leaders in the church, not with authority and oversight as elders, but are the "servants" of the church, as the word itself means. Again the Greek word for servant, **diakonos**, has been transliterated into English as the word **deacon**. They are to serve the church in whatever sphere of service can be done in the name of Christ and to His glory. See Acts 6; I Timothy 3:8-15.

Qualifications and Duties of the Elders

The qualifications for the elders are set down by Paul in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

Christ is the Head of the church and all authority within the church is His authority. The elders are simply executives of His will as revealed in the New Testament. The elders have no authority to teach new doctrines or to make new regulations. They are simply the ones who are to see that the local church does the work that the Lord has given it to do. They are to teach, feed, or shepherd the flock. They are to oversee and discipline. See Hebrews 13:17. They are to minister to the needs of the congregation. See James 5:14. They are servants of the Lord, not masters of His people. They advise, lead, and teach the disciples for their own growth and for the progress of the church, doing all in the name of the Lord and to His glory.

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The Elders

Qualifications - I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9

There are 23 qualifications, 15 of which are positive, and 8 are negative. The qualifications fall into 6 divisions: 1. Experience, 2. Reputation, 3. Domestic relations, 4. Character, 5. Habits, and 6. Ability to teach and oversee or rule. The word "must" means that "it is necessary."

Positive Qualifications

1. Blameless, of good report - good character
2. The husband of one wife - "a one woman man"
3. Vigilant - on the alert, ready and able to recognize danger. See Acts 20:28-31.
4. Sober - "Of a sound, steady mind," can be counted on, people know what to expect, not carried about by every wind of doctrine, not swayed by smooth speech or flattery, not susceptible to being intimidated or used by pressure groups
5. Given to hospitality - in the home and in the meeting place, arrive early and leave late to greet the casual visitors and strangers
6. Apt to teach - capable to teach mainly by instructive example, and then oral instruction
7. Patient - longsuffering with the weak members
8. Having obedient, believing children
9. lover of good - all things and persons truly good
10. Just - a natural sense of justice, fair play, evenhanded
11. Holy - fully surrendered. Worldly [fleshly, carnal] elders make a worldly church
12. Self-controlled - not the mouthpiece of another, not controlled by habits of thinking and doing
13. Holding to the faithful word which is according to the Scriptures. See I Timothy 5:17. True to the Word of God.
14. Able to convict the gainsayers - I Peter 3:15,16.
15. Orderly - "Let all things be done decently and in order" (I Corinthians 14:40). Things are well arranged and planned.

Negative Qualifications

1. Not given to wine - a drinking elder is not above reproach, either from "within" or "without." "Abstain from all [every] appearance of evil" (I Thessalonians 5:22).
2. No striker - not pugnacious, not a fellow who loves to scrap. Don't precipitate crises that patient teaching would prevent.
3. Not greedy - "Covetousness . . . is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). "No man who does not love the Lord enough to give at least a tithe of his income to the Lord's church has a right to vote against expenditures

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for which he is not willing to pay his share." Doesn't cheat or profit at the expense of others.

4. Not a brawler - not "one who sits long at his wine," "quarrelsome over wine."
5. Not a novice - without experience.
6. Not self-willed - not carnal, does not look only after his own interests.
7. Not soon angry - not hot-headed, doesn't "fly off the handle." "Righteous indignation" is permitted and encouraged when there are valid causes or reasons.
8. Not contentious - Does not "wear his feelings on his sleeve," or "carry a chip on his shoulders."

Appointing Elders

As need arises and as men are qualified. Men may perform the functions, or do the work, of the elders without being ordained to the office of elder. Enough to do the work. [One for every 10-15 families? Or 5 elders & 7 deacons?] **Always** a plurality (more than one). See Acts 14:23; 20:17-38; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5. Refrain from appointing **any** until a plurality can be appointed.

Duties Of The Elders

- I. Take heed unto self
 - A. Watch one's own life
 - B. Rule one's own household well
 - C. Hold fast the teaching of the Word of God
 - D. Be an example to others
- II. Feed or shepherd the flock
 - A. Worship
 - B. Teaching
 - C. Preaching
 - D. Exhortation and encouragement
 - E. Preventive and corrective discipline
- III. Oversee the church
 - A. See that the church is spiritually fed and led
 - B. Protect the church against the enemies of the faith
 - C. Seek the wandering ones. Keep them regular in attendance
 - D. Rule well the church of Christ

Elders' Reward

I Peter 5:1-4

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The Church: Its Worship

What is Worship?

To worship is to set forth, or proclaim, the "worth" of God. Worship is the person's adoration of God, the reaching of the soul after God, in Whose image the soul is made. Notice in John 4:19-24 the two requirements of worship. Worship must be in spirit, and it must be in truth. God is Spirit, and is served by the spirit, by the inner being. No act of worship is true or useful if our heart is not in it. The position of the body is not mandatory, whether sitting, standing, kneeling, or falling prostrate. Worship is in the spirit, not in the body. Mere ceremonialism, a mere observance of the form in worship, is nothing. The spirit must give meaning to the act itself. We associate with the word worship such terms as praise, reverence, awe, profound respect, love, devotion, submission, service, fellowship, and interaction.

To be "in truth" our worship must be according to the truth revealed by God in the New Testament. No one by oneself knows how to worship God; one must be taught by God Himself. If we are right in spirit, naturally we will want to worship the way that God wants. People without the Scriptures worship according to their own knowledge, thoughts, and desires. Very often they practice strange and even revolting rituals. Only when God reveals to us what is right can we worship "in truth." Thus, it is not for you or me to say what we think is fitting or proper in worship. Since we are worshipping God, He alone can teach us how to worship. In worship, as in all religious matters, our question should be: "What does God want, and what has He commanded?" Consider carefully Matthew 15:1-9. Our worship is in vain unless it is according to truth; the truth of God revealed to us in the New Testament.

What Is New Testament Worship?

Study Hebrews 10:19-31. Verse 25 exhorts us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Worship not only is private adoration of God, but also public or corporate praise to God. Acts 20:7 informs us both **when** the early disciples came together and the **chief reason** for their assembly. Notice that they met on the first day of the week. That was the first day of creation itself "when the light first had its birth." That day is the beginning of each new week. Pentecost and the founding of His church by Christ were on the first day of the week. Above all, the first day of the week was the day of the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The disciples came together on that day for a specific purpose, i.e. "to break bread." "To break bread," of course, refers to the Lord's Supper. According to this passage, it was the Supper which brought them together. While they were together, Paul preached to them. But they did not come primarily to hear preaching; they came "to break bread."

Many denominations today do not break bread more than once monthly, or once a quarter, or even once a year. Some never break bread. The question then remains: Why do they come together on the first day of the week? The same passage which reveals that they came together on that day also tells us that they came together in order to break bread. Do we come together in order to break bread, and then go away without breaking it? Search such Scriptures as I Corinthians 11:23-29; 10:14-22; Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-20; John 13,14,16,17.

Acts 2:42 tells us that the early disciples "continued steadfastly," or devoted themselves to, the apostles' doctrine or teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. Thus preaching or teaching, fellowship together, and prayers are both approved precedents or examples and expressly commanded. The Lord's Supper, however, remains the central act of worship on the first day of the week.

The New Testament also commands the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, i.e. in Ephesians 5:19;

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Colossians 3:16. We have the example of Jesus and His apostles in Matthew 26:30.

Another means of worship is giving to the Lord for the support of His work. Give careful attention to I Corinthians 16:1,2; II Corinthians 9:5-9. Notice that our giving is to be periodic, i.e. "upon the [every, NIV] first day of the week." Giving is to be personal, i.e. "every one of you."

It is to be planned, i.e. "lay by him in store." Giving is to be proportionate, i.e. "as God hath prospered him." It is to be planned, i.e. "that there be no gatherings when I come." What religious group ignores the command to give "upon the first day of the week?" Why do some insist on the command to give on the first day of the week, while ignoring the insistence of Jesus that we "do this [break bread] in remembrance of" Him?

The current practice of giving suppers, sales, bingos, entertainments, or services in the name of the church as means of raising money is entirely unknown to the New Testament. The Lord's work is to be supported by the Lord's people. We give to the Lord on the first day of the week as a means of worship. The purpose of giving is not only that the church may finance its program, but that Christians may grow spiritually through sacrificial giving.

An individual who loves the Lord will give for His work. You need not entice him with suppers, sales, or bargains. One who loves God will give all that one is able to give. Such a gift helps both the work and the giver. Note in John 3:16, that where there is love, there is giving. The measure of our love is the degree of sacrifice that we are willing to make for the object of our love.

Thus the New Testament provides approved precedents or examples and express commands for the Lord's Supper, teaching or preaching, fellowship, prayers, singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and giving. This corporate or public worship is to be on the first day of the week or Lord's day (Revelation 1:10). We can, and must, worship God privately at any time. We can worship together with prayers and singing, and study together any day, or every day of the week. But we come together on the first day of the week especially to break bread and to "lay by in store." This is the only act of worship in all the Word of God specified by Jesus Himself as being "in remembrance" of Him.

Should We Worship and Commune Every Lord's Day?

Acts 20:7 shows that the early disciples came together to break bread on the first day of the week. Some still say, "Does this mean **every** first day of the week?" Is it proper for us to commune only once a month, or to assemble every other Sunday, or quarterly, semi-annually, annually, or only at "Christmas" and "Easter?" When the Scriptures tell us "the first day of the week," does it mean **every** first day of the week?

Let us consider an example from the Old Testament. God told the Jews in the Ten Commandments Moses to keep the Sabbath (the seventh day) holy (Exodus 20:8,11). He did not say explicitly, "Remember **every** Sabbath day to keep it holy." Yet the Jews have always understood that keeping the Sabbath day is a weekly duty to God. They do not observe a Sabbath or two a year. They understand the command to mean **every** Sabbath. So also should we interpret Acts 20:7 and I Corinthians 16:2. Keeping the first day of the week holy in the New Testament means **every** first day of the week.

Weekly or Daily Communion?

Some are quick to point out that the same Greek word used in Acts 20:7 for "to break bread" is also used in Acts 2:46 for "breaking bread." "To break bread" or "breaking bread" is used both in reference to the Lord's Supper and to an ordinary supper or meal. It was the common expression for "eating food." A careful study of the context makes it clear in Acts 2:46 that here it is in reference to an ordinary meal. "Breaking bread from house to house, [they] did eat their meat [food] with gladness and singleness of heart." It is used in its

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every day, ordinary sense simply of eating a meal. The idea of an ordinary meal is out of harmony with either Acts 2:42 or Acts 20:7.

If one were to err either on the side of frequency or infrequency, one should opt for frequency. If one should assemble to observe the Lord's Supper every day of the week, he also would observe it each first day of the week. This is the only action in all the Word of God which Jesus Himself specified and commanded to be done in remembrance of Him.

Children And The Lord's Supper

Marvin Scherpf, minister with First Christian Church in Bend, Oregon, recently addressed questions about children and the Lord's Supper in the church's newsletter. With his permission, we are happy to reprint his comments:

1. Communion is relevant only for baptized believers. Those who have not yet become Christians cannot "discern the body" of Christ (see I Corinthians 11:29). There is no reason for anyone who has not accepted Christ and been baptized to partake.
2. The Bible makes it clear (I Corinthians 11:29,30) that God is serious about who does and who does not share at the table. One should not partake for wrong reasons.
3. While each is to examine himself or herself, some teaching is necessary so each will know how to do the examining.
4. Parents can teach their young children that they need to wait until they become Christians and can partake as Christ intends.
5. Communion is a special time for many worshipers. Children as well as adults can and should learn that this is not a time to be moving around and/or making noise. We all need to respect the needs of others for this to be a quiet time.

Let us all--especially parents--resolve to help little children approach Communion in the right spirit. Let us love them and teach them. Then when the time comes for them to share at Communion, they will do so with informed, believing hearts.

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Editorial, Sam Stone, Editor
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Marriage And The Home

What is Marriage?

The study of marriage and the home may be approached from many different standpoints, depending upon the particular specialty of the teacher and upon the goal in view. The sociologist, physician, counselor, psychiatrist, psychologist, and lawyer each has valuable information to contribute in each field. Christian students would profit from a knowledge of the basic data made available in these spheres of study. Marriage, however, is first of all a divinely ordained institution. Marriage, the church, and the principle of civil government are the only divine institutions on the face of the earth. That is, these are the only institutions of society established or ordained by God Himself. Since marriage exists by divine right and blessing, only the Scriptures can give us information about its final meaning and obligations. Marriage is fundamentally a **religious** agreement, and no amount of scientific data can compare in significance with that fact.

Marriage today exists on two levels; it exists by the permission and protection of two authorities. Marriage is a legal contract, recognized and subject to the law of the land. Marriage involves matters of property, name, etc. which fall within the jurisdiction of the civil law and civil courts. The granting of a license to marry by the state, the ceremony itself, the presence of witnesses at the ceremony, the recording of the license are all part of the legal aspect of marriage. These enable the state to perform its duty regarding the legal obligations involved. People through their own laws make or regulate marriage to this extent. The home, to this extent, exists and is protected by the authority of the civil government. Christians are responsible as citizens to observe civil law as it applies to marriage.

But is this all? By no means. Society may record the marriage and may judge in the legal matters involved, but marriage itself is made by God. Marriage has a right to exist because God ordained it. Divine law established marriage and the home before there was a civil law. Marriage is not a mere human arrangement or a privilege which society has taken to itself. God designed it. God unites a man and a woman. Marriage has a sacred obligation to its divine Author.

Notice in Genesis 2:18-25 that God saw man's need for a "help meet" and created woman. God made the bond between them to have precedence over every other bond. Man was to "leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife." Marriage was given through the wisdom and love of God before there was a civil government. The home is older than civil government. Marriage and the home are regulated by an older law than those of society. The divine right of marriage is its fundamental meaning, and the legal contract recorded at the county courthouse is but the state's recognition of the union, that it has legal status and obligations. We find in Ephesians 5:22-23 the re-affirmation of the original meaning of marriage. Notice that Paul likens the relationship between man and woman in marriage to that holy relationship which exists between Christ and His church. Both home and church are divine institutions. Both are here because of the wisdom and love of God. Both are protected with His blessing.

Study carefully Matthew 19:3-9. Notice that when Jesus was asked about divorce, He does not refer even to the [divine] law of Moses, but returns to the original meaning of marriage. Since marriage is fundamentally a religious contract made before the state came, divorce is not the right of the state. God alone can break what He has made. Indeed society can break what society has made. The state can dissolve the legal relationship which it has recognized. But this legal relationship is not the marriage itself. "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." If the legal relationship is dissolved in the courts by divorce, the religious relationship still exists, so that re-marriage involves adultery. All ministers would do well in assisting in weddings to make it clear that they are only witnesses and advisors, and that the marriage is actually performed in heaven as God joins the two together. It is God Who says that the two "shall become one."

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God, of course, can break what He Himself has made. Matthew 9:9 tells us specifically under what circumstances God breaks the union that He has made; that is, when adultery is committed. Romans 7:1-3 shows that God also dissolves the bond through the death of either party, and that the one left is free to marry again. According to the Scriptures, the holy bond is broken only by unfaithfulness by one of the parties or by the death of one of them. Society can break what society has made, but society does not make the marriage. Marriage is not a mere social contract. See also Matthew 5:31-32.

Adultery is such a violation of the sacred union that God dissolves the union and sets the innocent person free. Naturally, to obey the laws of the land, the legal bond must also then be dissolved in the courts before remarriage. But the court action has nothing to do with the essence of the marriage itself. That was here before courts or governments.

God's Design for Marriage and the Home

God in His wisdom saw the need for marriage and the home and in His love supplied that need by Himself joining man and woman together and blessing their union. What were the needs which God saw? What were His purposes for the home as He has made them known to us?

Read Genesis 2:18-20. "It was not good for man to be alone." Man by nature is a social creature and needs companionship. Love is natural to his being, for he is in the image of God, and "God is love." Man needed a "help meet," that is, a help "suitable" to his nature. The creatures inferior to him were not suitable, for satisfying companionship involves the understanding of equals. Man needed a **person** like himself, one capable of sharing his intellectual and spiritual aspirations and hopes. Since this sharing of mind and soul is a need of human nature and since marriage was designed to fill this need, mere physical attraction, infatuation, or coupling are not enough for a lasting and happy marriage.

Another design or purpose of marriage is given in I Corinthians 7:1-12, 25-40. Paul here warns that persecution and trouble are coming upon Christians, and that those who have families will suffer most in the turmoil. He would spare them this heart-ache, and advises that as a single man or woman they will have less suffering. He realizes, however, that through enforced celibacy some would fall into sin and would thereby suffer more than the physical sufferings of persecution. He tells them, therefore, that if they cannot refrain from sin that they should marry, despite the hardships that were coming. The Scriptures take account of human nature as it was created by God, and marriage is a protection of individuals against vice, fornication, or immorality.

Read Genesis 1:26-31, especially verse 28; Ephesians 6:4; Proverbs 22:6; Psalm 127:3. Marriage and the home are given of God to bring children into the world and for training them in character and in the knowledge of God.

God gave marriage and the home for certain divine purposes and no one who is unwilling to strive earnestly to achieve these has a right to establish a home. The vows made in marriage are not mere legal contracts, but sacred religious obligations. Violations of those vows is not only a disloyalty to the married partner, but a sin against God Who granted the union. "What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder."

CHRISTIAN DUTY TO THE CHURCH

We become Christians through faith in Jesus Christ, repentance from sins, and baptism for the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We now turn our attention to what it means to be a Christian, how we live the life that we have begun in baptism. Our Christian duties may be summarized under two main headings: (1) Our duty as Christians toward the church, and (2) Our duty as Christians in daily life with family, friends, colleagues, or other human beings. We now concern ourselves with our duty toward the

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church and its work.

1. It is our Christian duty and privilege to worship with other Christians on the first day of the week. See Acts 20:7. Each of us, of course, should worship privately or with others any day of the week in prayers, Bible reading or study, and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. But we must come together with others on the first day of the week to break bread. This public worship helps each of us to be strong in the Christian life, and our presence encourages other Christians. Hebrews 10:25 admonishes us to be diligent in this Christian duty to assemble that we might exhort and encourage one another.
2. Each of us has a duty to work in the program of the church. Each must do his part of the work and must cooperate in the general plan of the church as a whole. Paul tells us that the church works as the human body. Each does his own particular work, which may be unlike the work of the other members, yet each is related to the work of the whole body. I Corinthians 12:12-31 shows that the body is not one member or one type of work, but it has many members and many different jobs. If the work of one member is neglected, the efficiency of the body suffers. The body functions gracefully only when each member does the particular work, which it is fitted to do: i.e. the foot walking, the ear hearing, the eye seeing, the tongue speaking, etc. So in the work of the church, some Christians can lead in the singing, some can teach classes, some can preach, some can invite and bring others to hear the gospel, some can greet strangers, some can visit in the homes, some can perform personal Christian service tasks, etc. Each does one's work and each work is important. The healthy body is not the one in which a few of its members function wonderfully, but that in which each member does its work. The eye may be perfect, but it cannot hear. So each has one's own work for the church and its program as a whole.
3. It is our Christian duty to the church to support it with our financial means. Money is required to carry on the work of the church and to preach the gospel in other lands. The only Scriptural way to raise these funds is through the free-will giving of Christian people. Study carefully I Corinthians 16:1-2; II Corinthians 9:5-9.
4. It is our Christian duty to be subject to the elders of the congregation. Peace and order in the congregation depend upon the elders. But the elders cannot do their duty in this regard unless the members are loyal to them and respect their authority. Hebrews 13:17 warns that we should be subject to those who watch on behalf of our souls. We should make their work a joy and not a task. In matters of doctrine or teaching, of course, Christ is the only Head of the body and all members obey His directing. But in the practical every day matters that come up within the life of the church, the elders are the ones to make decisions. The body is one in doctrine if all members obey Christ, the Head. The body is one in function and work if all members submit to the discipline of the elders of the congregation.
5. Our Christian duty to the church demands that we settle personal differences within the church, rather than in the courts of law. Study carefully Matthew 18:15-35; I Corinthians 6:1-6. Notice that disputes between Christians should be settled between themselves alone if possible. If they cannot reach a peaceful solution together, they are to enlist the aid of one or two mutual trusted Christian friends. If these still cannot reach a peaceful solution, they should ask the counsel and advice of the elders. The court of last resort, or final appeal is to take the dispute before the church. The decision of the church is to be received by them. If one refuses to abide by the impartial decision of the church, that one is to be considered as a "publican and a Gentile." Christians are not to go to law before a civil non-Christian court for the settlement of their disputes.
6. It is our Christian duty to love every other Christian with a filial affection. Notice the command in I Peter 2:17 to "love the brotherhood." A Christian, of course, must love all persons, for all bear, through creation, the indelible image of God. But there is a special warmth and closeness about the love among those who have obeyed the will of the Father of the family. Notice that Christians are to be known by all people for this love that they have for each other. See John 13:35. Paul's comparison of the church

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with the human body makes clear that there is a strong sympathy and fellowship among the members. When one suffers, the body as a whole suffers. If the hand is infected, the whole body will suffer with fever and pain. The whole body may perish because of the hand. We are all one in the church, for each is united with Christ. See also Galatians 6:9-10.

Careful attention to, and exercise of, each of these will both enable us to fulfill our Christian duty to the church and to grow and develop spiritually into mature, devoted disciples of Jesus Christ.

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Christian Duty In Daily Living

Conversion is the change that comes about within us through the power of God when we yield to His command to be immersed. Immersion, however, has no value and no meaning unless this inward change takes place. We are not only "born of the water," but also "of the Spirit." The entire Christian life is the product of conversion which God works in us. The good deeds of the Christian life are, then, the work of God, and not of men. See Romans 12:2. Christians are not like the world in their lives because within they are of a renewed mind. This renewing of the mind is a cooperative accomplishment of a person and God. One yields in surrender and God works the change through His grace. The clay can be fashioned by the potter into a vessel of beauty, provided the clay cooperates by being pliant. The clay, however, cannot say that it has fashioned itself. Study well Ephesians 2:8-10; Galatians 2:20.

The new birth presented by Jesus in John 3 is simply this inward change or the renewing of the mind, as Paul calls it. Notice in verse 8 that those who are born of the Spirit are compared to the wind. No one can see the wind, that is, the real power itself; though we see the effects of it in the trees, grass, and debris along the way. Just so, with conversion no one can see the real power within, the grace of God; yet the results of that power in the outward life are manifest to all. We can see a person living according to the Christian way, and by this fruit can be convinced that he has been born from above.

Christian living is a demonstration of the power of God, testimony that Jesus Christ lives. See Matthew 7:16-25; II Peter 1:5-9; I Corinthians 2:14-3:4. This last passage makes clear that when Christians are jealous and factious, they are still carnal. That is, they are "fleshly" rather than spiritual. They are of the flesh rather than of the spirit. They are worldly. Their lives continue to be inspired and governed by the standards of the lost world that they left, rather than by the Word of God. Paul writes of "the fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5:22-26. This "fruit of the Spirit" is composed of the good deeds and good attitudes that result from this inward change wrought by the Spirit from above. If this fruit is not borne in the life, then the Spirit has not converted the life within. The submissive, obedient follower of Christ is the "spiritual" person. This may seem too mystical to some who hold that becoming a Christian is simply a legal change of relationship. But the Scriptures certainly teach that becoming a Christian is a radical and dynamic change within an individual.

Naturally the result of the new birth is a "new creature," at first a "babe in Christ." The Scriptures teach that, although the conversion is radical and thorough, the whole life later is a constant growth in grace and knowledge. The newly born baby is fully a human being at birth. The fact that the infant or child needs to grow does not detract from the completeness of its birth. So fully converted and fully born Christians must grow in the Christian life.

How is this growth made possible and nourished in practical ways? Prayer is a priority. Prayer is the exercise of the soul toward God. It is one way that the soul cultivates friendship with the Most High. Prayer is the essence of worship. Prayer is the honest searching of the heart in the presence of the Lord. It is the vigorous commitment of the life to God's will. Prayer is the hill top from whose height we can survey the surrounding scene and see all things in their true proportions and in their relation to one another. We can see from that vantage point just where we are and just which way we want to go. While walking through the valley, we may become confused and lose perspective and direction. When we climb the hill, we can see how foolish we were in our confusion and misdirection. "The world is too much with us" and unless we are often in prayer, we shall find our Christian goals being hidden from us or being disguised or disfigured in our sight. Without prayer there is no growth in grace, but only a gradual but certain spiritual death. "Even that which he hath shall be taken away."

Scriptural prayer is composed of the basic elements of adoration or praise, confession, thanksgiving, and

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supplication both in intercession for others and petition. ACTS is a good acronym or acrostic to help us to remember these basic components. Memorize, analyze, study, and use the pattern or model prayer which Jesus gave His disciples in Matthew 6:9-13. Give careful attention to the prayers recorded throughout the Scriptures. Above all, practice daily the spiritual discipline of prayer.

We learn more and more of what God has done for us and of what He wants us to do by daily Bible reading and study. When we are first baptized, naturally we want to do whatever God wants us to do. But then we must study that we may know what He wants. We cannot do the will of God, however much we may be willing, if we have not studied enough to know what it is. Our faith must have content as well as intention.

Fellowship within the church has tremendous meaning and value in spiritual growth. The faith, hope, and love of each is aided by the meeting of mind and heart in public worship or study and Christian society. It is very hard indeed for an individual to remain a Christian by oneself. One needs the reassurance, comfort, insights, and even rebukes of other Christians if he is to keep his ideal clear and sure. Paul writes that there were "saints in Caesar's household." Surely if men could be true to Christ in that corrupt place, they can be Christians in spite of anything. The story probably would have been different, however, if there had been only one saint isolated in a world of bribery, prurience, and degeneracy.

Times of silence, solitude, suffering, self-denial, sacrifice, fasting, meditation, and a simple lifestyle, if used properly, also may contribute to Christian growth and development.

We can give you no hard and fast rule for living the Christian life. We are no longer living according to law, but according to grace through faith within. We cannot simply list a number of prohibitions and a number of commands and say that these constitute Christian life. It is more dynamic than that. Consider Jesus' summary of true spiritual living: love God with all your being and love your neighbor as yourself. Read Matthew 22:36-40. Augustine said that a person should love God, and then do just what one wants to do. And so it is. If we love God, we want to do what is good. Until we want to do what is good, we cannot live the Christian way. The Christian life is not conformity to a rigorous code of law, but the springing up of good from within the heart that has been laid hold upon by the Spirit of God. One can then delight in being subject to the "law of Christ."

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The Holy Spirit

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

There is a great deal of confusion in the religious world about the Holy Spirit and His work. Some sects, cults, and denominations have been set up with no distinctive doctrine other than a particular and peculiar view about the Holy Spirit and His operation. The situation is natural in a way, because our minds are geared to the physical world and cannot comprehend the ultimate nature of spirit. We can understand physical facts in a logical sense, but we must accept spiritual truths from the Bible by faith. The Bible is clear in its teaching about the Holy Spirit. The difficulty arises when we begin to speculate on points which have not been revealed. It is our purpose simply to present what the Bible teaches on this subject and to believe that, even though the spirit world must remain a mystery to the finite mind.

Let us see first of all that the Holy Spirit is not a vague something or other, not an atmosphere or wind, not a nebulous unconscious mass. The Holy Spirit is a "Person," a member of the Godhead. He is generally spoken of as "he" throughout the Bible. Matthew 28:19 will suffice here to show that the Holy Spirit is a Person and a part of the Godhead, though many other Scriptures might be cited.

How these three can be three and still one we cannot understand in a logical way. Such is impossible in the world of relations that we know. We believe this mystery by faith. The Holy Spirit is God, yet not God the Father or God the Son, but one with Them.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the organizer, the systematizer. He brings symmetry out of that which is unfashioned. Notice that in the creation of the world, God the Father was the Author, Initiator, or Architect of it all. God the Father is known as Creator, but He was aided in creation by the other Persons of the Godhead. See Genesis 1:26. Who are these other Persons? See John 1:1-3. Here we are told that "the Word was God" and that all things were created through this Word. Who, then, was this "Word" through whom all things were created? John 1:14 tells us that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." So then, this Agent through whom all things were created was the Son of God who was incarnated in Jesus Christ. The Word was with God in the beginning, but at one point in history the Word became man, and we call Him Jesus Christ. Now see the work of the Spirit in creation. See Genesis 1:2. The Spirit moved through the unshaped mass which was without form and void. The Spirit moved through the world organizing and shaping that which was created, but which was still nebulous.

This same division of work can be seen in the plan of salvation. Here again God the Father is the Author, Initiator or Instigator, and Architect of the plan. The Son of God was the Agent through whom it was executed. See John 3:16. After the crucifixion-resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit came to organize the church and set up the laws and regulations for its life by inspiring the New Testament. See John 15:26; 16:7-15. Notice that the Holy Spirit was to come after Jesus left. He would come to guide the apostles into the truth in which Jesus had instructed them and in other matters which at that time they were not yet able to receive. Jesus' work was finished in His death and resurrection. But salvation for men was not assured until the Spirit set up the church and gave the New Testament for its guidance.

Thus the world was created through miracle, but was set up to run by law and regulations; so also the church came into being through miracles and special works, but its continued life is through the laws and regulations set down by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. In both cases God the Father is the Author, God the Son is the Agent, and God the Holy Spirit is the Organizer and Regulator. After the world was set in motion and

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its laws made operative, express special miracles of creation were no longer needed; so also when the New Testament came as the permanent law for the church, express special miracles were no longer required.

Means of Receiving and Measures of the Holy Spirit

1. Jesus Christ received the Spirit without measure. See John 3:34. Jesus alone, so far as we are told, is the only one who ever received the Spirit without a limit on His use. Others received Him for specific reasons and works. Jesus received Him without measure. The Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove immediately after His baptism. Read Matthew 3:16-17.
2. The apostles on Pentecost and the household of Cornelius received the Holy Spirit in baptismal measure, or "the baptism of the Holy Spirit." They were immersed in Him, or covered up with Him, as He came directly upon them from heaven. The church was begun on the Day of Pentecost, and on that day the apostles received the Spirit from God. See Acts 1:26-2:4. You will learn from reading Acts 2 the purpose of this baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit. It was a proof that these men were of God and spoke by His authority. Notice that the Holy Spirit had nothing to do with their conversion or with their salvation. The Holy Spirit did not come upon the sinners, but upon the apostles. He was to aid them in their work of teaching. The New Testament was not yet written, and the people had to have some means of knowing if these men were speaking the truth from God.

Cornelius and his household also received the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit. Study carefully Acts 10:44-48. These were the first **Gentiles** to be converted to Christ. Notice that the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles as a means of convincing the **Jews** that the Gentiles could receive baptism and so enter into the church of Christ. The Holy Spirit did not save Cornelius and his household. Notice that after the Holy Spirit came upon them, Peter commanded them to be baptized. Since baptism is for the remission of sins, the coming of the Holy Spirit could have nothing to do with that. Otherwise, baptism would have been unnecessary. See that the baptism of the Holy Spirit made Peter understand that he could not forbid the Gentiles to come to Christ. These are the only two **baptisms** of the Holy Spirit. One came at the beginning of the church upon the apostles, and the other came upon the Gentiles. In neither case did the Holy Spirit come as a means of conversion or salvation. There is no promise that any one will receive a baptismal measure, or the baptism, of the Holy Spirit today. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was part of the miraculous beginning of the church.

3. The Holy Spirit received through the laying on of the apostles' hands is a third measure of the Holy Spirit. The apostles had power while they were on earth to lay their hands on Christian converts and to bestow on them the power to perform miracles. No one else, so far as we can tell, had this power. Those who received the Holy Spirit in this measure and by this means could work miracles to prove their preaching and teaching, but they could not pass along the Holy Spirit through the laying on of their hands. Only the apostles could do that. Study carefully Acts 8:5-24. Notice that Philip, one of "the seven" servants and an evangelist, but not an apostle, preached the gospel and could perform miracles himself, but could not bestow the Holy Spirit on the converts of his preaching. He sent to Jerusalem, and the church sent two apostles, who laid their hands on them. See again that these people in Samaria were converted and baptized into Christ **before** they received this power to work miracles.

Since only the apostles could bestow the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, when they died this power ceased. When the generation on which they had laid their hands died, the express special miracles ceased. The Holy Spirit in both baptismal measure and through the laying on of the apostles' hands was not for conversion or salvation, but for special reasons pertaining to the necessities inherent in the beginning of the church. They were not a part of the permanent superstructure of the continuing church, but were essential in its establishment and foundation. No one receives a baptism of the Holy Spirit today, and no one surely receives it through the laying on of the apostles' hands.

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4. The Holy Spirit is given in a non-miraculous way today to all who obey Christ. Acts 5:32 teaches that the Holy Spirit is given to all those who obey God. We know that all Christians are born "of the Spirit," and that this new birth is "from above." Yet we do not receive the Holy Spirit in miraculous form. Read I Corinthians 13:1-4, 8-13. Paul wrote that love in our hearts and faith and hope in our lives are worth more than miracles, and that though miracles fade away, these three will abide. Faith, hope, and love were part of the permanent abiding structure of the church. Miracles were necessities of its inception. Today we have the New Testament, and all who hear us can know for themselves whether we are speaking the truth from God. We don't prove our teaching or preaching now by miracles, but by the established Word of God. In the beginning of any organization, special procedures are followed until the regular and constitutional procedure can be established. When the rules are once set up, the organization lives by the rules, and not by special procedures.

The measure of, or means of receiving, the Holy Spirit expressed in Acts 2:38 remains the only way available to us today to receive the Holy Spirit. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Unless and until one obeys the gospel of Christ, one cannot receive the Holy Spirit. Each person who obeys the gospel does receive the Holy Spirit.

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Two Ways Of Pardon

You may have noticed in our assemblies that often after every sermon we extend an invitation and sing an invitation song for the convenience of any who desire to respond to that invitation. You may have noticed also that as Christ's invitation is extended, the preacher often makes clear that there are two ways of responding to the call. All of us are sinners. But there are two kinds of sinners. Both need pardon. Each is to obey the commands which apply to that sinner.

First, of course, is what we may call the "alien sinner." This is that person who has never become a Christian at all. We call that person "alien" because he has never become a citizen of the kingdom of God. All the sins of one's life are still upon that person until one obeys the commands of Christ, that is, until one obeys the gospel. We know that without baptism, there is no remission of sins. Thus, in extending the invitation we always urge alien sinners to obey the gospel of Christ so that they can become children of God or subjects in His kingdom.

The other part of the invitation is extended to the erring Christian. Baptism washes away all our sins. Baptism does not prevent us from committing sins. We are lost sinners prior to baptism and saved sinners after baptism. Our continued steadfast faithfulness to Christ, His Word, and His church is a part of the plan of salvation or scheme of redemption. Revelation 2:10 makes clear that the crown of life will be given to those who are faithful until death. So the Christian life must be lived after baptism if we would receive the final reward.

What then is the way of pardon for the erring Christian? After one has been properly baptized and then sins, what is one to do for pardon? Is one to be baptized again for every sin? No, for there is only "one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). When we are baptized, we come into the kingdom and thereby have a new relationship with God which enables us to go to Him. How then are we forgiven after baptism?

Acts 8:13-24 makes clear in a specific example what was done in New Testament times. Simon the sorcerer believed and was baptized, but then sinned by trying to buy with money the power of the apostles. Peter condemned this sin and told Simon to "repent and pray." Simon in turn requested them also to pray for him. Peter did not tell Simon to be baptized again, for he already had been baptized and entered into that relationship with God by which he had access to the Father.

Nowhere in the New Testament was this way of pardon ever applied to an alien sinner. No alien sinner was ever told to "repent and pray," or to "pray the sinner's prayer." This is the way that applies to sinning Christians who have entered into that relationship with God in which they can pray to Him for forgiveness. Remember in Acts 10 that Cornelius prayed, but that he was not forgiven through prayer. Rather God sent Peter to preach the gospel to him and to baptize him. Saul of Tarsus was praying (Acts 9:11) when Ananias came to him. But notice in Acts 22:16 what this disciple told this alien sinner to do. See also James 5:16.

The law of pardon for the alien sinner thus requires hearing with the understanding the gospel of Christ; belief, faith, and trust in Christ as one's personal Savior; repentance from sin; confession of faith in Jesus as the Christ, the one and only Son of the one true and living God; and commitment to Him by immersion in water for the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Any person so immersed with faith in one's heart is no longer an alien, but a citizen with the rights and privileges of citizenship. One of these privileges is access to the Father. So now when one sins, one can go to God in prayer, repenting and confessing one's sins, and be forgiven. Study I John 1:7-10.

We need no human priest to intercede for us with the Father. Each Christian is a royal priest. All the children are spiritually equal in God's family. All disciples can go to God on the same basis. A minister, preacher, or evangelist is only a teacher of the Word of God. He is not a confessor nor a mediator. He too

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must go before the Lord with his sins as every other disciple. Study carefully I Peter 2:5.

You will notice from our passage in James that we are to confess our sins one to another. We are not to confess to a priest or to a special clergy, but to one another. James was writing this to disciples in general, not to clergy persons. Our confession of sins for forgiveness is made to God through Christ, and Christ alone is our Mediator. Christ is therefore a suitable Mediator of man's approach to God.

If we have committed a public sin, it is expedient that we make public confession of it. It is not that this public confession brings forgiveness. But the public confession can help remedy the public damage that has been done. The forgiveness comes only through our confession to God. When a Christian has slipped back into a life of sin, but decides to repent and do better, one must confess one's sins to God and pray for forgiveness. As a good example to others, one should also make a public confession of sins and let all know that one is starting again. This step also helps a person hold to one's resolution to do better, and enlists the support of fellow disciples of Christ.

Whatever our sins, and wherever we are, Christ died for us and calls us. See Matthew 11:28-30; John 14:6. Christ is the Way, the only Way, and each must find salvation through Him alone. There is a way of forgiveness or pardon for the alien sinner, and there is a way of forgiveness or pardon for the backsliding Christian. Whatever our need, if we will arise and go to Him, He will in no wise cast us out.

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Testing The Miraculous

Belief in the God of the Bible, or in the trustworthiness of the Bible itself, requires the belief that there are miracles. See Hebrews 11:6. Anyone who believes the very first verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:1, believes that there are miracles. And if you believe Genesis 1:1, you can believe all the miracles of the Bible. "For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37). "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

God is able to perform miracles as He is to work in any other way. God is able to work through miracles as easily as He works through the laws of nature which He Himself has ordained. John speaks of the miracles of Christ as simply His "works." Yet there is a difference between the supernatural or miraculous acts of God and the natural acts of God, of which we speak as "the laws of nature."

There are a number of tests by which we can determine the difference between these two. We can determine by these tests whether or not a miracle is genuine.

We need first to define "miracle." What is a miracle? The nature of a miracle lies in its evidential value. Divine providence, God's watchcare, or God's intervention in our lives, includes miracle. But these include much more than miracle. These include both the natural and the supernatural. God does not intervene every time in our lives **only** through miracle. It is not a miracle **that** God intervenes in our lives. It is not miraculous **every time** that God intervenes in our lives. As a matter of fact, God constantly intervenes in our lives.

Every miracle has a twofold underlying purpose. We must therefore test for, and determine, this twofold purpose. Every miracle is performed to confirm the message and to confirm the messenger as from God. Read carefully such passages as I Kings 17:24; John 20:30-31; Mark 16:17-20; Hebrews 2:4; Matthew 11:20-21. Miracles have especially to do with divine revelation.

We must take into account the finality of divine revelation. What is the **purpose** of miracle? What are miracles intended to accomplish? Miracles are to confirm, to convince, or to produce faith. We now have the completed written revelation from God, and can refer to it as final authority. See Isaiah 8:18-20; Galatians 1:8-9; Revelation 22:18-19; Hebrews 1:1-2. We find Jesus Himself always referring to the written Word of God as final authority. He would ask, "What is written?," or "Have ye not read?," or He would affirm, "It is written." We must reject any claim on the basis of a miracle or miracles that denies or contradicts the final authority of Scripture.

The Scriptures also teach that there are false or pseudo miracles. Study Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:15-22; I John 4:1-6; II Corinthians 11:13-15; Galatians 1:8-9; II Peter 2:1. Recognizing this fact will itself enable us to be more discerning as to what constitutes a genuine miracle.

There is an **economy** of miracles in the Bible. That is, we go through long periods of time without a single recorded miracle. For example, from the close of Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, ca. 430 BC, until the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 4:24-28), we do not have a record of a single miracle. Miracles seem to cluster around the great crisis events in history. We find a cluster of miracles during creation, the exodus from Egypt, the incarnation, the earthly ministry of Christ, the redemption wrought by Christ in His crucifixion-resurrection, Pentecost, the establishment of the church, the completion of the New Testament [in effect the entire Word of God], and again at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Only one miracle is essential to our salvation. The crucifixion-resurrection of Jesus Christ is the supreme miracle, the miracle of miracles. This is the greatest miracle since the creation itself, and will remain so until

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the end of time. It is this miracle that makes possible the remission of our sins and our eternal salvation. The entire book of Acts is permeated by miracles. Acts is also the book of conversions. Yet every conversion followed the preaching of the gospel, i.e. the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. No one after Pentecost was ever saved by any other miracle. No miracle in itself has ever been the immediate instrument or efficient cause of salvation. Notice I Corinthians 15:1-4.

Biblical miracles were not performed for the personal benefit of the one working the miracle. Read II Kings 5:15-27. Jesus never performed a miracle for His own personal benefit or convenience. Notice Luke 4:1-13. Neither, for example, is there any record of Jesus ever "speaking in tongues." If such were essential, Jesus Himself would have set the example and commanded it, just as He did with baptism and the Lord's supper.

God does not do for a person what the person can do for oneself. Study carefully John 6:5-14. The five thousand could not provide food for themselves. They could sit in an orderly fashion. They could carefully save the leftovers. They did want Jesus to be their king and continuing source of food. Jesus would not accept that kind of crown. God fed Israel in the wilderness for forty years. The manna stopped as soon as they entered Canaan and were able to fend for themselves. God always requires a person to do whatever one is able to do for oneself.

God is no respecter of persons. "God so loved the world" (John 3:16). God dearly loves each of us. But God does not show arbitrary preference for any one of us over the rest of us. Study carefully Acts 10:34; I Peter 1:17; Colossians 3:25.

Coupled with this is the fact that God does not perform miracles on demand. Notice Matthew 12:38-40; Luke 16:27-31; Mark 6:5-6. God is not a glorified errand boy, bellhop, or genie, always at the beck and call for every selfish demand.

God is self-consistent. That is, God is always consistent with Himself. The Holy Spirit never will contradict Himself. The history of religion provides innumerable claims of miracles from religions, denominations, sects, and cults, while providing contradictory, often self-contradictory, teachings or doctrines. These are frequently diametrically opposed to one another. The Holy Spirit, however, will never deny, contradict, or oppose any teaching of His Word. Notice Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; I Corinthians 12:4-11.

The general attitude is that if God does intervene in our lives, that in itself is a miracle. People seem unable to conceive of a God Who regularly, as a matter of course, intervenes in the lives of nations and individuals. They seem unable to comprehend that He is able to do this working through the natural law which He set in place by miracle in the beginning. They "feel" that God can have contact with us only by way of miracles. Thus the word miracle is used merely as a synonym for any thing unusual, strange, odd, or immediately unexplainable. We need to be more precise in our use of language. We should not always speak of divine providence, watchcare, or intervention as "miracle." We must obey the injunction of Scripture to test the miraculous, to "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1).