

BIBLE DOCTRINES

A Laymen's Guide to the Teachings of Scripture

by

Ed Mathews

2015

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Posted in the United States of America for everyone throughout the world seeking to do the will of the Sovereign Master of the universe.

All praise to Him who was, who is, and who always will be.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all those—both here and abroad—who were influenced by my ministry. With sincere respect and grateful appreciation, I acknowledge your faithful encouragement. It sustained me during my rigorous schedule of teaching, preaching, writing, and traveling. Though we may not communicate any more, your memory remains locked in the scrapbook of my mind.

It has always been my prayer that your journey to the realms above was made easier because our paths crossed here below. Someday soon we will meet again. Then, face to face, we will reminisce about how our short encounter in time blossomed into an eternal fellowship. I look forward to that great reunion.

For that (and much more), I stay the course, keep the faith, and wait in hope. It will not be very long. See you soon!

Ed Mathews
January 8, 2015

PREFACE

Few people study the doctrines of the Bible. They often prefer the opinions of pop culture. Books on Bible dogma contain strange words and complicated ideas. The majority of folks—even many believers—are turned off, disinterested, and annoyed with such “stuff.”

The author is deeply concerned. A generation is growing up without a solid foundation for their faith. They are ripe for being lead astray. What is needed, then, is an easy-to-read introduction to the teachings of the Christian faith.

This book is not a sophisticated discussion of biblical theology. It does not address scholars. Instead, simplicity of expression and clarity of thought are the guiding principles of its composition. Complicated arguments and novel theories are avoided. The goal is to let the Bible speak for itself.

The following material is an honest effort to learn the truth. It is an examination of the teachings of the inspired text. It tries to explain what is contained in the word of God. In the end, conscientious readers will be better equipped to decide for themselves what the Lord requires of them.

A limited number of theological developments over the last two thousand years are discussed. The author is all too painfully aware that space limitations disallow an exhaustive analysis of every idea. Much is omitted. The exclusion of intricate concepts is intentional. This is, after all, *A Laymen’s Guide to the Teachings of the Bible!*

Theology is a fascinating field of endeavor. It is the foundation of our faith. This book is written for those who want to learn the rudiments of Christian belief. If the reader has already worked through the fundamentals of theology, he or she will certainly find the *Laymen’s Guide* less challenging. Obviously, the more one knows, the easier this book will be to read.

The material is divided into ten chapters. The chapters should be read in the order in which they appear. They follow a logical development—one doctrine leads to the next doctrine—like the construction of a building that proceeds from the ground up. It is sincerely hoped that what is of God in the following pages will be kept and what is not will be cast aside.

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CHAPTER ONE

GOD

We begin with God. Does He exist? Is He real? If we cannot answer “yes” to these questions, there is no reason to continue. For, if God does not exist, creation did not happen. Jesus was an imposter. Salvation is nonsense. And the judgment will not occur. Moreover, if there is no God, religion is silly. Church is a waste of time. The Bible is a grand hoax.

So does God exist? Suppose it is assumed He does. Can we know Him? If He really exists, how can we locate Him? Where should we look? How shall we proceed? We are encouraged to “*seek the Lord.*” And, best of all, we are promised that we can “find Him,” II Chronicles 15:2; Isaiah 55:6. With that guarantee in hand, we move on in our search for the Almighty.

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

God can only be known through what He does. We must locate the fingerprints of His activity. A search is launched in an effort to discover Him.

A. Possibility Of Studying God

Objection is frequently raised against the feasibility of humans finding God. How can a mortal discover the immortal? How can flesh find spirit? How can the visible see the invisible? It is impossible—unless we have faith. “*Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see,*” Hebrews 11:1. Therefore, we can “*know*” Him. We can “*understand*” Him, Jeremiah 9:23,24; cf. II Timothy 1:12. If we look for God “*with all our heart and with all our soul*” we will surely find Him, Deuteronomy 4:29. He is not very far from any one of us, Acts 17:26,27. Faith is a knowledge of God discovered through a love for God, I John 4:7,8. Only faith in God can see God. Only love for God can understand a God of love. Hence, we can know God in proportion to our willingness to trust and obey Him, I John 2:3.

B. Sources For Studying God

We know God only as far as He has made Himself known. He has revealed Himself through nature and Scripture. Nature “*declares the glory of God,*” Psalm 19:1. It reflects His great power, Romans 1:20. Scripture proclaims His unique character. It discloses His gracious provisions. Nature lays the foundation. Scripture is the superstructure. Together they supply adequate resources for our search.

C. Limitations In Studying God

God can never be completely known by mortal beings, Job 11:7,8. Mysteries will always remain. And, even if we could see Him, human language is inadequate to fully explain divine reality. We can try but our thoughts will stagger under the burden to express the inexpressible. Theologies are like watches. The worst is better than none. The best are never entirely accurate.

We must accept that a comprehensive understanding of Him is beyond our grasp, Romans 11:33. Our search is encumbered with a certain amount of expected limitation. Still we must press on. The difficulty involved in the task is merely a measure of the complexity involved. It suggests the value of even an approximate success.

II. ASSUMING THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The existence of God must first be assumed. Then it can be verified by observation and reflection. We see before we know we have eyes. But, when we discover our eyes, we can assume they were there all along. So it is with the existence of God.

A. Universal Assumption

The assumption of divine existence is universal. People everywhere believe in a celestial reality. Even the pagans venerate the existence of heavenly deities. Their concept of God is often quite different. This difference does not cancel the existence of divinity. A child believes he has a father. His inept drawing of his dad does not disprove the reality of his parent. Moreover, no one should doubt the existence of the multiplication table because some indigenous tribe does not have one. So no one should doubt the reality of God. Our inept explanation does not negate His existence. And, though some heathens are without God, none are without their gods.

B. Necessary Assumption

The assumption that God exists is necessary. Everyone has a capacity for religion. The existence of a higher Being is indispensable to that inclination. Something does not come from nothing. Though some people reject religion, this does not cancel the reality of God. For, as cream cannot rise in frozen milk, so worship will not surface in a rebellious heart, Romans 8:5,7.

C. Independent Assumption

The assumption of the existence of God comes from a hunger in the human soul. We long for something beyond this life, Ecclesiastes 3:11. We worship because we sense there is Someone greater in the universe. Only a fool disregards these obvious clues, Proverbs 1:7. It is absurd to think that we worship because we see others worshipping. Do horses eat hay merely because they see other horses eating hay? The Creator has put the evidence of His existence in each

person “*so that men are without excuse,*” Romans 1:18-20. The Bible does not attempt to prove the existence God. It recognizes that the evidence is all around us. All we need to do is open our eyes and see.

III. EVIDENCE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Evidence for the existence of God is suggested by His handiwork in creation. Logic cannot prove His presence with absolute certainty. Obedience to His commands can, I John 3:24a. Evidences merely make it more reasonable to believe than to deny His existence. So we begin with a grand assumption. God is. We proceed knowing all human argument for His existence cannot render a divine conclusion. Thankfully, religion is not produced by a proof of His presence. Nor should it be abandoned because of insufficient evidence.

A. Adequate Cause

Everything begun owes its existence to some producing cause. For, out of nothing, nothing comes. Something is. Therefore, something was. The world is here. It is made up of parts that depend on each other. As a whole, then, the world must depend on something other than itself. The universe is limited. It is not eternal. It had a beginning. Everything begun must have a beginner. That which is produced must have a producer. What is made must have a maker. All of this suggests a causative power adequate to make our world. It does not determine whether that cause was an unlimited, intelligent, independent being. Neither does it determine whether the cause was many, limited, unintelligent, dependent forces.

B. Intelligent Design

A phenomenal order pervades our world. A useful design is reflected throughout nature. Hence, there must be intelligence adequate to produce this orderliness. The universe is a harmonious system instead of a chaotic confusion. Efficient causes precede proficient results. Perfection must have a perfecter. The universe has a predetermined design. A design suggests a designer. A designer indicates intelligence. Order cannot come from disorder. A greater cannot come from a lesser. The incredible order in the world demands an intelligent designer equal to its production. This argument raises the recognition of an adequate cause to an intelligent architect. It does not determine whether this intelligent cause was an unlimited, independent being or a limited, dependent being.

C. Moral Agent

Humans think. They distinguish between right and wrong. The capacity to think morally cannot come from a non-thinking, amoral source. Something cannot come from nothing. There must be a cause wherever there is an effect. Humankind, as an effect, demands a rational, ethical cause. Such a cause must be a superior person. Human experience senses His commands and

dreads His threats. Since there is a finite moral submission, there must be an infinite moral sovereignty, [James 4:12](#). The value of this argument is that it adds personal lordship to the previous aspects of causative power and intelligent design. However, it does not determine whether this moral, intelligent cause was an unlimited or limited being.

D. Supreme Being

Most humans believe there is an absolute being. It is assumed that that existence is necessary in order for such an idea to appear in the mind. It is inferred, then, that a supreme being is out there. This is a clever conclusion. It allows a human idea to be the measure of divine reality. That is risky. Yet the value of this argument is in showing what God must be if He exists at all. Our most profound concept would be false if an absolute being did not exist. Our mind would have tricked us into believing a lie. And, if our minds mislead us into accepting the existence of what does not exist, our mental capacity is called into question. We believe God exists not because we can conclusively demonstrate that He does but because our mind will not allow us to think otherwise. The reality of a supreme being is assumed. Otherwise the truth of His presence could not be inferred. Hence, we believe that God exists.

E. Religious Faith

A belief in God is more than argument. It is more than logic. Knowledge of Him comes from an experience of Him, [1 John 4:13](#). So it is more profitable to live as if He exists than try to prove His presence. This leads to three positive affirmations about religious faith.

1. Beneficial Belief. God cannot be fully known. His existence cannot be completely explained. Yet, if religious convictions do not contradict logical conclusions, we are justified in following our faith. In other words, for those who believe in the existence of God, faith is allowed. Hope in Him is legitimate. If belief adds to our happiness, than our happiness is sufficient justification for faith. And, though the need to believe is not evidence for the truth, the beneficial outcome of such faith cannot be denied.

2. Passionate Commitment. A beneficial belief justifies going without evidence. A passionate commitment suggests going beyond evidence. For faith is always a leap, a firm conviction in spite of the impossibility of rational explanation. It is a longing to act as if God exists. It is a decision to live out that longing in order to make Him real. The danger is that in doing so we may substitute what our hearts prefer for what our heads perceive. At what point, can the need to believe become a license for wishful thinking?

3. Positive Presence. Finally, we insist that God exists. We refuse to argue the matter. To those who are convinced God is present in them, debate is beside the point. The experience of Him is self-authenticating. Worry over proving His existence is fruitless. We believe God is in us, [1 John 2:3](#). He is nearer than near to us. There is no need for further discussion. Instead,

all our energy is consumed with remaining in Him, John 14:17b.

In spite of what has been said, there are some who still deny the existence of God. They ignore His commands, Psalm 14:1. They live in defiant wickedness, Ephesians 4:17-19. Atheists tend to mock religion, to destroy morality. They remove the boundaries between right and wrong. Those who deny the existence of God believe the universe made itself. They belittle reason and scorn experience. They cannot please God, Hebrews 11:6.

IV. NATURE OF GOD

Every effect has a cause. Thus, it is reasonable to say, olives grow on olive trees. Figs come from fig trees, James 3:11,12. And, using similar logic, the behavior of a person is a clue regarding who he or she is, Matthew 7:16. Hence, when observing the actions of God, we can discover His characteristics. This is not speculation. It is a legitimate deduction.

A. Absolute Characteristics Of God

In reference to the Almighty, the word “absolute” has to do with His nature. God is complete. He is who He is, Exodus 3:13,14. God is independent of everything. He is self-sufficient, entire, lacking nothing.

1. Spirit. God is spirit, John 4:24. This means He is not composed of material substance. Spirit is immaterial, invisible, and immortal, Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:15; I Timothy 1:17.

2. Infinite. God has no limits, Mark 10:27. He is not bound by the universe (except where He chooses to limit Himself), Psalm 113:5,6. God does not rely on anything finite. His resources are inexhaustible. His activities are self-directed and beyond full comprehension, Job 5:9; Psalm 92:5.

3. Perfect. The Lord always does what is right, Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 18:30. His way is excellent because His will is perfect, Romans 12:2. To state it differently, God is flawless. His thoughts, His feelings, and His decisions are without error. He does nothing wrong. God is holy, Isaiah 6:3. He has nothing to do with sin, Habakkuk 1:13. God is love, I John 4:16b. He always has the best interests of others in mind. He loves for their sake rather than His own sake. God, then, is good, Psalm 107:1.

B. Relative Characteristics Of God

The infinite, perfect, spirit called God is independent, self-sufficient, and unlimited. In making the world, however, He established a reality beyond (or outside) Himself. His connection with creation reflects His relative nature. He condescends to interact with the material world.

1. **Source.** God is without beginning or end. He is “*from everlasting to everlasting,*” Psalm 90:2; cf. Psalm 102:27. He is eternal, Romans 16:25-27; cf. Jude 25. He gave birth to time when He started the clock of history, Genesis 1:1. In making the universe, God created space (though the heavens cannot hold Him), 1 Kings 8:27. God is immense. Immensity is infinity in relation to space. Eternity is infinity in relation to time. God recognizes these relationships though He is totally free from their constraints.

2. **Support.** God can care for His creation because He is everywhere, Psalm 139:7-12. He fills the universe, Jeremiah 23:23,24. He is present in all places at all the times. Furthermore, God knows all things, Hebrews 4:13. He knows our needs before we request His help, Matthew 6:8. God has all power, Matthew 19:26. He is in complete control. Therefore, He can enable us to do more than we “*ask or imagine,*” Ephesians 3:20.

3. **End.** God is the “*beginning*” and the “*end,*” Revelation 22:13. Thus, from Him and through Him and to Him are all things, Romans 11:36. He is the goal toward which all creation moves. God “*does not lie,*” Titus 1:2. His word is certain. His promises are sure, Isaiah 40:8. We do not fully grasp what he pledged. We cannot see what He guaranteed. But it is out there, 1 Corinthians 2:9. God is merciful, Titus 3:4,5. That is why He sacrificed His Son on our behalf, John 3:16. In mercy, He promises. In faithfulness, He keeps His word.

V. PLAN OF GOD

The plan of God is what He decided to do, Ephesians 1:11. It is His blueprint for the universe. His plan was complete before the beginning. It has not been amended during history. It will succeed in the end, Psalm 33:10,11. The plan of God is unchanged because He is changeless, Malachi 3:6; James 1:17.

A. Verification Of His Plan

God has a plan for everything He made. His agenda will not be frustrated, Isaiah 14:26,27. No one can stop Him from accomplishing His will, Daniel 4:35. The Lord sees the future because He planned it. He knows what will happen because He decreed it, Isaiah 46:10,11. A universe without a plan is like a plane without a pilot. God does not grope along aimlessly. The planets do not meander haphazardly. The world is a fine tuned machine. It required advanced planning. Whether building skyscrapers or solar systems, blueprints are essential. Why, then, assume that God has no plan?

B. Freedom Of Human Choice

The plan of God does not inhibit the freedom of man. His foreknowledge does not determine outcomes anymore than the prediction of a physician causes the death of a patient. Instead,

the plan of God includes human choice. It guarantees our right to determine our destiny. There is no conflict between human freedom and the divine plan. Fish have unrestrained movement when someone carries the fish bowl. The rotation of the earth around the sun does not stop us from moving about. The fish are free to swim. We are free to act. Though both are carried to a destination by forces beyond their control, their freedom remains intact.

VI. WORK OF GOD

The work of God is simply the execution of His plan. Obviously, God intended to create the world. He is *“the Maker of heaven and earth,”* Psalm 115:15. We were not present at creation. We did not see it happen, Job 38:4. We *“understand”* what occurred as a matter of faith, Hebrews 11:3. God spoke and the world came into existence, Psalm 33:6-9. All things were created because He decided to create them, Revelation 4:11. Creation reveals His glory. It does not increase His grandeur. It merely demonstrates it. God actively preserves everything He made, Psalm 36:6; Colossians 4:17; Hebrews 1:3. He guides all things to fulfill His plan. Creation explains the existence of the universe. Preservation accounts for its continuation. And providence helps it get where it was designed to go. God is busy, John 5:17. He cares for the world, Matthew 6:28-33. He rules in the affairs of nations, Psalm 66:7. He watches over the lives of men. He answers their prayers, Psalm 33:13-15; Isaiah 64:4. Surely, if a benevolent God found it worthwhile to create the world, He would also find it worthwhile to care for it. We are compelled, therefore, to believe in providence. We do not always know how it works. But we can be assured that it is moving the world toward a predetermined destiny.

VII. THE TRINITY

God is an eternal trio of persons. We call this triad the trinity (or the Godhead). These persons are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. At first glance, this may seem like tri-theism. But it is not. For, while there are three equal persons, there is only one divine nature. We call that nature “God.” Thus, the trinity is not three Gods in one God. Rather, it is three persons with the same essence of deity.

A. Godhead Has Three Distinctions

The trinity is a complex doctrine. There are no analogies in human life that illustrate it. There are no comparisons that clarify it. Still the trinity is a necessary teaching. It is essential in understanding how God could be *“love,”* I John 4:16b. For, if love is not between persons, it is self centered (which leads to selfishness). But, the Father is God, John 6:27. The Son is God, John 1:1; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; I John 5:20. And the Holy Spirit is God, I Corinthians 12:4-6. The three share as equals in the baptismal formula, Matthew 28:19, and the apostolic salutation, I Peter 1:2. In other words, the Godhead clearly has three distinctions.

B. Godhead Has Three Persons

The Father is distinct from the Son, John 5:32,37a. The one is distinguished from the other as the begetter and the begotten, John 1:14,18. They are also differentiated as the sender and the sent, John 10:36; 12:44,45. The Father and Son are distinct from the Spirit, John 14:16,17. The Spirit proceeds from the Father, John 15:26. He is sent by the Father through the Son, John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7; Galatians 4:6. If there is not a trinity, these passages are absurd. The identification of the three persons in the trinity shows how the divine essence is common to all of them. It shows how the Father dwells in and works through the Son. It demonstrates how the Father and Son dwell in and work through the Spirit.

C. Godhead Has Three Equal Persons

The equality of the three persons in the trinity is substantiated when the activity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is explained.

1. The Father Chose. He selected those who would be saved, Ephesians 1:3,4. That choice was all part of His eternal plan, Ephesians 1:11. He is the first in order of action. But priority of action does not mean superiority of importance. The trinity is like our heart, lungs, and brain. Though the heart has a priority of action, it is not superior to the other organs of the body. When it comes to the trinity, we must believe rather than rationalize, worship rather than speculate.

2. The Son Saves. The Son was sent to save the lost, Luke 19:10, to redeem the world, John 3:16. He is called the "Son" because His incarnation was due to the power of God, Luke 1:35. He is "the One and Only" begotten by the Father, John 1:14. Though He became flesh, He was God, John 1:18. His sonship is rooted in the eternal relationship of the trinity. And, due to that relationship, He was able to reveal the Father to the world, Matthew 11:27. Thus, He is also called the "Word of God," John 1:1; Revelation 19:13, the "image of God," II Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15, and "the exact representation of His being," Hebrews 1:3. Though second in order of function, He is equal in terms of deity, Philippians 2:5,6.

3. The Spirit Sanctifies. The third person of the Godhead was sent by the Father and Son to renew the ungodly, to sanctify believers, Romans 8:13,14. He completes what the Father planned and the Son provided. The Spirit adds the finishing touches to the design and the purchase of heaven. The Father formulated the medicine. Christ delivered it. The Spirit administers the remedy in order to affect the cure. The Godhead has three equal persons. Their activity appears in time as a succession of operation. The terms "Father," "Son," and "Holy Spirit" are approximations of the truth. They are attempts to use human language to express divine reality. The limitations of these labels must not be allowed to obscure the idea they try to convey.

D. Godhead Has Three Eternal Persons

The tri-personality of the trinity is evident in numerous passages. For instance, the Son existed before time, John 1:2; Colossians 1:17. And, like Him, the Holy Spirit was eternal, Hebrews 9:14. The Father and the Son interacted “*before the creation of the world,*” John 17:5,24. The universe was made by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Genesis 1:1,2; Psalm 104:30; John 1:3; I Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2,10. In passage after passage, the Scripture asserts the reality of three eternal persons in the trinity.

E. Godhead Has Only One Essence

The term “person” is a less-than-perfect means of expressing the truth. The labels “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” are metaphors. They rise out of the temporal arrangements of the incarnation. They are not the eternal realities of the trinity. Each person in the celestial triad possesses all of the characteristics of deity. Thus, on occasion, the terms “Father,” “Christ,” “Lord,” and “Spirit” are used interchangeably, I Corinthians 15:45; II Corinthians 3:17; Galatians 4:6; Philippians 1:19. This interchangeability allows ascribing what one in the celestial threesome does to either of the remaining two, John 13:20. It is accurate, then, to say, regarding the trinity: “in one is each of the others.”

CHAPTER TWO

SCRIPTURE

The term “Scripture” refers to a collection of sacred documents. These documents are authoritative religious writings. They are called the “Bible.” They include stories, commands, songs, proverbs, poems, prophecies, and letters. The Scriptures are regularly read in public worship and private devotion. They are the handbook of salvation.

The Bible is the “word of God.” It is a message from heaven. Through it, the world is made aware of the intentions of the Lord. He revealed Himself in nature. He also spoke directly to man. The Creator did everything He could to inform His creation.

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

God communicated with human beings. Unlike idol gods, which cannot speak, Jehovah clarified who He was. He explained what He planned to do. He outlined what was in store for the world He made.

A. Possibility Of A Special Divine Revelation

The Maker of the universe was not tangled in His creation. He was not muted by the cosmos He made. The Lord was willing and able to make Himself known. He spoke. His words were recorded. When a person reads His word, the thoughts of the God are heard, the message of heaven is revealed.

1. Need For Such A Disclosure. The depravity of pagan people demonstrates the need for Scripture. Though they possess the light of reason, their spiritual condition is unsatisfactory, Psalm 53:1-3. They need to be taught religious truth. They are unable, in their present state of sin, to attain full enlightenment on their own, Jeremiah 10:23; cf. John 6:68. There are questions—such as the origin of man, the forgiveness of sin, and the destiny of the soul—that human intuition cannot fathom, Job 11:7-9. The conclusions of the unaided mind regarding spiritual matters are defective and empty at best, imperfect and corrupt at worst. Mortal creatures need guidance from their immortal Creator, Isaiah 48:17.

2. Existence Of Such A Disclosure. There is a partial revelation of God in creation, Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:18-20. Surely, what the Lord began, He would finish. Humans should expect that a greater revelation of infinite wisdom would be supplied. Nature points to a higher power, Acts 14:17. Will that higher power disappoint? Will the God who made human

beings abandon them? Will He walk away and let those made in His image fend for themselves? Certainly a gracious God would not. Instead, He spoke. His words were written down. A special revelation is now available to all who want to read it.

B. Reality Of A Divine Revelation

The Christian Scriptures are a gift from above. They provide insights into the mind of God. Nowhere does His word contradict the evidence in creation about Him. Instead, His written revelation confirms the preliminary understandings deduced from nature. It builds on the knowledge reflected in the heavens and the earth. It remedies the defective human interpretations of His handiwork. All of this is so because the author of the Bible and the Maker of the universe is the same. He confirmed His authorship by miracles and prophecies. Such supernatural verification was necessary. It reassures human beings that His revelation was not their imagination, Judges 6:17. And, in addition, miracles and prophecies demonstrate that that revelation was authoritative, I Kings 18:36-39.

1. Miracles. A miracle is an event contrary to the regularly observed processes of nature. It is a supernatural intervention in the natural order. Miracles serve to confirm the trustworthiness of the messengers of God, Hebrews 2:1-4. They are called “*wonders*” because of the effect they have on those who observe them, Acts 2:22; cf. Mark 2:12; 4:41; 7:37. They are labeled “*signs*” since they point to the work of God, John 3:2. They are referred to as “*powers*” because they display His supernatural strength, Acts 6:8.

(a) Probability Of Miracles. A remarkable event in nature can be caused by any being superior to nature. Humans can do things which nature left to itself cannot do. And, if humans can do such things, surely God can, too! cf. II Kings 6:5-7. A miracle is simply a superior force operating in the world. The improbability of miracles can be entertained only if one spells “God” with a lower case “g.” In other words, those who reject God will reject miracles, Mark 6:1-6. Scripture does not argue from a belief in miracles to a faith in God. Rather it argues from a faith in God to a belief in miracles, cf. Luke 16:29-31.

(b) Possibility Of Miracles. A faith in the probability of miracles rests on a belief in the existence of God. A faith in the possibility of miracles is based on the belief that God will act when needed. He who has no God will regard miracles as unnecessary. He who believes in God will accept their possibility. However, miracles are not His regular mode of operation. They occur only when He decides they are needed.

(c) Necessity Of Miracles. Miracles have an important place in the plan of God. They confirm His presence. They attest to the truthfulness of His messengers. Off and on, through Scripture, there are periods of miraculous activity. During these times, God proved the seriousness of His intentions to man. Then, during the absence of miracles, man was encouraged to prove his seriousness to God. At the end of history, there will be a burst of

“counterfeit miracles,” I Thessalonians 2:9. These so-called *“signs”* will deceive *“those who are perishing,”* I Thessalonians 2:10. God can still work wonders. And, He will do so, if necessary. In the mean time, the saints must be alert. They must pray and wait.

2. Prophecies. A prophecy is a prediction concerning the future. Since God alone knows what is ahead, He is the only one qualified to prophecy. Miracles attest to His power. Prophecy attests to His wisdom. God alone can see beyond the present. The Bible contains numerous fulfilled prophecies. Hence, it must be the word of God. True prophecy can readily be distinguished from false prophecy. A genuine prediction will foretell an unforeseen event. It will forecast the event before it occurs. It will contain enough detail to point to a specific fulfillment. And, obviously, a genuine prediction will happen just as it was predicted. God has declared His ability to anticipate the future, to predict what is coming. He rested His claim for being the one, true God on His supernatural wisdom, Isaiah 42:8,9; 44:6-8; 46:8-11; 48:3.

(a) Moral In Character. The predictions in Scripture were often the reaction of God to the actions of man. Israel is a prime example. The words of heaven regarding the behavior of the Jews reflected the ethical emphasis of biblical prophecy. Israel would be blessed if she obeyed, Leviticus 26:1-13. She would be cursed if she disobeyed, Leviticus 26:14-35. These prophecies literally became her history foretold. She was conquered by a foreign nation, II Kings 24:12b-14. She was humiliated, Lamentations 2:20-22. Israel became a hiss and a byword, Jeremiah 29:18. Why? She suffered because she ignored the Lord Almighty, Jeremiah 19:15. Eventually she was allowed to return to Palestine, Jeremiah 31:10-12; Amos 9:9-14. She limped home. She started over. Yet it was her sin that determined her destiny. The predictions of God are a monument to the moral character of prophecy.

(b) Accurate In Outcome. Prophecy is an overwhelming evidence for the divine authorship of the Bible. The fate of ancient nations is a case in point. It was predicted that Nineveh, the capitol of Assyria, would be destroyed. Her demise would come unexpectedly. She would collapse in confusion, Nahum 2:1-13. Nineveh would become a pasture for flocks. Those who pass by would *“scoff and shake their fists”* in mockery at her desolation, Zephaniah 2:13-15. A similar fate awaited Babylon, Jeremiah 50:35-40; 51:37-64. Wild beasts would make their bed on her ruins. Her neighbors would avoid pitching their tents on the rubble of this once proud city, Isaiah 13:1-22. Tyre, a powerful city-state in Phoenicia, would also be demolished, Ezekiel 27:27-36. Assyria, Babylon, and Tyre disappeared. All that is left is their history. But, Israel, the weakest among the ancient nations, remained. Or, as the Scripture says, they were not *“completely destroyed,”* Jeremiah 4:27; 5:18; 30:11; 46:28. How did the prophets know the great empires of the ancient world would disappear? How did they know Israel would survive? Does this not point to the divine authorship of the Bible? Nothing is more clearly evident and more abundantly substantiated than *“no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophets own interpretation.”* On the contrary, *“prophecy never had its origin in the will of man.”* Instead the prophets *“spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit,”* II Peter 1:20,21. Only God could know in advance the history of the ancient

nations. Only God could predict the future in such detail. He did so without a mistake, change in forecast, or subsequent claim of fuller knowledge.

(c) Clear In Purpose. Prophecy was not given in order to map out the future. The children of God are to walk by faith instead of by sight. Prophecy was not intended to disturb a believer, to distract him from his regular responsibility, II Thessalonians 2:1,2. Rather, prophecy was designed to give assurance of the foreseeing wisdom of God. It was a guarantee that the Scriptures are from above. The Lord saw the end from the beginning. The accuracy of the Bible leads to an unequivocal conclusion: the Scriptures are a special divine revelation. Prophecies are simply a collaborating witness with miracles to the unimpeachable authority of His word. Since God had made His point, miracles and prophecies will cease, I Corinthians 13:8-10. The inspired word thoroughly equips the reader of Scripture *“for every good work,”* II Timothy 3:16,17. It is serious business, then, to be (or to believe) a false prophet, Deuteronomy 18:20-22; cf. Jeremiah 23:30-32.

C. Reliability Of The Divine Revelation

Human memory is far from perfect. Over time details can be added to or removed from the message. Therefore, the preservation of Scripture in written form was essential. If these documents are ancient, if they do not bear the marks of forgery, and if they are in the custody of their legitimate owners, they should be presumed genuine. By these rules, the Bible is authentic. The original copies no longer exist. Nevertheless, it can be fairly demonstrated that the Scriptures are the word of God.

1. Antiquity Of The Documents. The age of the biblical manuscripts warrant a belief in their trustworthiness. The oldest copies of the writings of Homer, Sophocles, and Horace were made over a thousand years after the death of these ancient scholars. By comparison, there are several fragments of the Bible that date within thirty years of the autograph documents.

2. Number Of The Documents. Only a few partial pieces of Homer, Sophocles, and Horace remain. There are more than four thousand five hundred manuscripts of the Bible.

3. Consistency Of The Documents. The classic works of Homer, Sophocles, and Horace vary widely. The biblical manuscripts have a phenomenal (though certainly not absolute) correspondence with each other. The variations in the Scripture documents are relatively insignificant: missing words, different word order, and misspellings. These, for the most part, can be attributed to unintentional copyist errors and intentional efforts to correct those errors. The actual problem passages—due to variations in the manuscripts—are few in number. Less than sixty out of the thousands of verses of Scripture contain major differences. None of them deal with salvation. It is quite certain that the original reading of almost every doubtful passage is preserved in one or the other of the existing manuscripts. It is reasonable, then, for readers of the Bible to trust in a book that is unique in antiquity, number, and consistency of

manuscript evidence.

II. EVIDENCES FOR THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE BIBLE

Christians are called to defend their beliefs. When the truth is opposed, they must stand their ground, I Peter 3:15. They must “*contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted*” to them, Jude 3. This requires serious preparation, Colossians 4:5,6. The facts are in. The verdict is rendered. The internal and external evidences for the divine origin of the Bible are most compelling.

A. Internal Evidence

The word of God speaks for itself. It stands on its own. The internal evidence for its authenticity is convincing. This evidence is found in the depth of its doctrines, credibility of its writers, and the inspiration of its contents.

1. Depth Of Doctrines. The profound teachings of the Bible are without equal. No other religious document reveals such a unique deity, Deuteronomy 4:32-35; I Samuel 2:2; Isaiah 43:10. No other sacred Scripture speaks so highly of man, Psalms 8:3-5. No other holy writ depicts the Lord inviting humans to be saved by grace through faith, Isaiah 1:18-20; Ephesians 2:8,9. Yet all of these teachings were recorded when the messengers lived among pagan polytheists. Surely the Scriptures are not a borrowed message, a human production.

(a) Unity Of Teachings. The Bible—authored by forty different people, in three different languages, during a span of fifteen hundred years—exhibits a remarkable unity. Such consistency is found in no other religious book. Amazingly, there are no contradictions. Whether speaking about God, man, morality, salvation, or immortality, the Bible is a harmonious unit. Without any collusion or collision, every writer says the same thing. The only reasonable explanation for such a phenomenal agreement is that one Mind produced this unprecedented volume of truth.

(b) Purity Of Ethics. The moral standard in the Bible permits no evil, Isaiah 1:15-17. It condones no sin, Isaiah 5:20. All actions are judged by the motives from which they spring, Psalms 51:6; Matthew 5:8; James 1:13-15. A person can justly argue that an ethic so comprehensive must have a divine origin. It surpasses all human ability to invent. It runs counter to all human inclination to produce. The fingerprints of God are on every page.

(c) Relevance To Humans. The Bible satisfies the longing of man for God. It promises that the Lord will help in time of need, I Corinthians 10:13; II Corinthians 12:9; Ephesians 3:20; Philippians 4:13. It tells everyone that the truth can be known, John 7:17; 8:32. It gives comfort in challenging times, Psalms 119:71; John 14:1-3; Romans 8:18,28; II Corinthians 4:17;

Hebrews 12:11; James 1:2-4. It states how purity can be found, I John 1:7,9. It cancels the fear of death, I Corinthians 15:53-57; I Peter 1:3-5. There is no other sacred book like it. The Bible offers hope. It gives reassurance. It defies imitation. It is the word of God.

2. Credibility Of The Writers. The authors of Scripture had nothing to gain: no fame, no favor, and no fortune. They were willing to suffer for what they said. They were sincere men dedicated to declaring the will of God. They exposed the sins of friend and foe alike. Without academic degrees or social prestige, they proclaimed the word of heaven among unbelieving people. They succeeded. They must have had divine assistance. Surely their words were what they claimed they were: a special revelation from God.

3. Inspiration Of The Message. The Bible is inspired, II Timothy 3:16. God “breathed” His word into His messengers. He acted upon their minds so that their message became an unerring record of truth, I Corinthians 2:13. They “received from the Lord what they passed on” to man, I Corinthians 11:23; Galatians 1:12; I Peter 1:12; II Peter 1:21. If these men were not inspired, the commands they uttered are the epitome of arrogance. Either they were moved by God or they were shameless imposters. Either their words were God-breathed or a grand fraud. There is no middle ground.

(a) Arguments For Inspiration. The Scriptures are the message of God delivered by the Holy Spirit through empowered human servants, Act 4:25. Inspiration is God speaking through man. The Lord determined the message. The messenger determined the literary form in which it was delivered. Though allowed to choose the means of expression, the messenger was held back from making mistakes. His words were the words of God, I Corinthians 2:9-13.

(b) Objections To Inspiration. Some folks object to the inspiration of Scripture. They think the Bible contains numerous errors. To these skeptics, then, the Scriptures are not the word of God. Yet, upon closer examination, none of their objections are leveled at the religious teachings of the Bible. All the presumed blunders concern secular matters: possible discrepancies in numbers, seeming mistakes in science, and supposed inaccuracies in history. However, when each suspected error is examined in its context, the objections evaporate. He who doubts does well to doubt himself. God made sure that His word remained His word. Why would He deliver the truth and allow it to be corrupted by man? It is a serious mistake not to take the word of God seriously, Hebrews 4:12,13.

B. External Evidence

The external evidence for the authenticity of the Bible is as convincing as the internal evidence. Together they form a very strong argument for the truthfulness of the Scriptures. The external evidence includes the discoveries of archaeology, the formation of the canon, and the influence of Christianity.

1. Discoveries Of Archaeology. Archaeology is the study of the antiquities of civilization. No object dug up—whether coins, pottery, statuary, tools, carvings, inscriptions, cemeteries, or buildings—is too insignificant. These discoveries flesh out the nuances of ancient life. They confirm the reliability of the word of God.

(a) Value Of Archaeology. Archaeology has the ability to furnish an accurate setting for the stories in the Scripture. These passages are grand “masterpieces” from antiquity. They were “painted” under particular social, political, moral, and economic conditions. A passage means what it was understood to mean by the one who wrote it. Only archaeology can “hang” these masterpieces correctly. And, only after they are displayed in their cultural context, can they be accurately evaluated.

(b) Verdict Of Archaeology. The accuracy of the Bible is denied by many critics. They set aside the validity of passage after passage. Archaeology has embarrassed these naysayers time and time again. The location of the Garden of Eden is not in China but in the Middle East, Genesis 2:14. The flood was not a local disaster but a worldwide destruction, Genesis 7:17-23. The Hittites are not a human illusion, Joshua 1:4. Though the skeptics once thought otherwise, archaeology has sustained the accuracy of the Book of Judges, the monarchies of Saul, David, and Solomon, the division of the Hebrew nation into Israel and Judah, the exile, the reconstruction of Jerusalem, and the truth of the Book of Esther. The same can be said for the existence of Jesus, the travels of Paul, and the letters of the apostles. The Bible has been found true in literally thousands of places where earlier it had been considered false. The strength of such corroboration is overwhelming. No archaeological discovery has been made that contradicts anything found in Scripture.

2. Formation Of The Canon. By the end of the first century AD, there were over one hundred books considered by various groups to be holy writ. Circumstances made it imperative to establish an official list. The inspired authors were passing away. Persecution was on the rise. And heretics already had their own lists. It quickly became necessary for the Christian community to make a final determination. Therefore, a long, deliberate study was made of the numerous materials available. Those that carried the marks of inspiration, that were verified in history, and that had the capacity to facilitate spiritual growth were accepted. The deliberation was serious. The verdict was ominous. After centuries of discussion, the present sixty-six books of the Bible became the official documents of the faith. This conclusion is entitled to the highest respect. The burden of thinking otherwise rests on the objector.

3. Influence Of Christianity. The spread of Christianity is nothing short of phenomenal. The benefits of the faith are equally as phenomenal. Together they form a persuasive challenge to any opposition raised against the inspiration of the word.

(a) Unparalleled Growth. The conversion of the Roman Empire was stunning. Christianity was met with furious resistance. It was declared an illegal religion. Yet, within

seventy years after the death of Christ, many pagan temples were nearly deserted. The Church flourished the best when it was persecuted the most. The wonder of this unparalleled growth becomes even greater when the situation is examined more closely. In its infancy, the leadership of the Church was “*unschooled*,” Acts 4:13. Christianity was called “a religion of the rabble,” I Corinthians 1:26-29. It demanded belief in a crucified Jew, I Corinthians 1:18-25. It called for humility (an unpopular idea in Roman society). It advocated self-sacrifice (also an unpopular concept at that time). It allowed no rival. Yet it did not force people to convert. The progress of an illegal religion—that was so uncompromising—cannot be explained without assuming the assistance of heaven. Surely the book which proclaims that faith must be the word of God.

(b) Unequaled Benefits. The influence of Scripture for the betterment of society is also a proof of its divine origin. People are transformed. The unfortunate receive care. Children are protected. Prisoners are visited. Strangers are welcome. Cruelty is opposed. Women are respected. Life is valued. Marriage is sacred. Temperance is commanded. War is discouraged. These (and other) teachings lift the moral tone of every culture in which the Good News finds a home. The believer is changed. And, when enough people are transformed, society is altered. The Bible is not a human fabrication. Otherwise, a preposterous lie has become a grand blessing. Every skeptic is challenged to find where decent people live in peace, where infants are cherished, where human life is held in high regard, and where, at the same time, the Gospel is absent. If the doubter can find that place, than he can validate his doubt. But, until such a situation is discovered, he should not discard the very book that brings civility to the world, that makes life tolerable, and that provides the greatest knowledge known to man.

III. DEALING WITH DOUBT

Doubting the word of God is not new. It has been around since the beginning. The term “*doubt*” suggests “a wavering in uncertainty,” Matthew 28:17. Instead of believing in the word of God, trust is paralyzed by skepticism, Mark 11:23. Such paralysis causes hesitancy, Acts 10:20. Thus, to act in doubt, is to withhold confidence. Faith loses its nerve because it hesitates to believe. However, when faith is most difficult, it is most necessary. Doubt hinders prayer, James 1:6,7. If one cherishes his doubts, he will be content with uncertainty. If he becomes content with uncertainty, he will finish in despair. Doubt is bankrupt. It has no moral compass. It offers no encouragement. It leaves life empty.

A. Causes Of Doubt

Doubt is caused by many things. One cause is *intellectual*. People become perplexed. They are mentally uncertain. They often fail to study the Scripture as a coherent body of truth. They hesitate due to the challenges confronting them, Mark 9:24. Another cause of doubt is *moral*. Some people doubt because of sin in their life. Their doubt is a psychological defense. They

find fault with the Scripture in order to take the spotlight off of their own wickedness, John 3:20. Plus there is a *spiritual* cause for doubt. Spiritual things can only be appreciated by the spiritually minded, I Corinthians 2:14. A person who does not live by the Spirit will find the Christian faith puzzling. Uncertainty is not far behind.

B. Responses To Doubt

There are good and bad, right and wrong ways of approaching a doubter. The believer should be "*merciful*," Jude 22. He should be ready to defend the truth, ready "*to give an answer to every one who asks*," I Peter 3:15a,b.

1. Wrong Way. People must be allowed to discover the truth for themselves, Job 34:3,4. A person can borrow a coat but he cannot borrow a religion. He can teach the truth to others but cannot experience the truth for others. Contempt for their reluctance is out of place. Debate will not win them over. A forced decision is not a personal conviction. A Christian must try to win souls rather than win arguments.

2. Right Way. A believer should always respond to a doubter with "*gentleness and respect*," I Peter 3:15c. We must be winsome in order to win some. A person comes closer to God through honest doubt rather than dishonest belief. Doubt toward pat answers does not exclude anyone from faith. Instead, it is often the prerequisite for attaining a deeper belief. Certainty regarding God requires a decision. Conviction is the result of climbing over obstacles. It is the product of turning stumbling blocks into stepping stones. Certainty is a gift given to those who surrender to all that is known, Hebrews 10:22; I John 2:3. It is a legacy to those who allow God to handle the "*secret things*," Deuteronomy 29:29.

C. Cure For Doubt

Ignorance of the Bible is the birthplace of vacillation. When superficially studied, the Scripture can spawn doubt. When thoroughly analyzed, the inspired word dispels uncertainty. Doubt does nothing. It undoes everything. It accepts confusion. It surrenders to uncertainty. It compromises with sin, Romans 14:22,23. Doubt does all of this with little (or no) hope of victory. The cure for doubt is resigning oneself to the reality of God. It is acknowledging the power of Jehovah to do what He promises, Romans 4:18-21. Such relinquishment discovers an assurance that quiets every question. It frees the believer to live an obedient life.

CHAPTER THREE

ANGELS

The word “angel” literally means a “messenger.” It occasionally refers to human couriers, I Kings 19:2; II Kings 1:2; Haggai 1:13; Luke 7:24. However, almost always, in Scripture, it designates a heavenly being that does the bidding of God. Because of who they are, angels are also called “*mighty ones*,” Psalm 29:1, “*holy ones*,” Psalm 89:5; Daniel 4:13,17,23, and a “*heavenly host*” (or army), Luke 2:13.

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Angels are real. They are mentioned throughout the Bible. Humans almost everywhere believe they exist.

A. Testimony Of Scripture

An angel restrained Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, Genesis 22:9-12. An angel appeared to Moses in the burning bush, Exodus 3:2. An angel heralded the impending birth of Samson, Judges 13:3. An angel brought disaster on the mighty Assyrian army, II Kings 19:35. And an angel rescued the apostle Peter from prison, Acts 12:6-10. These, and many other passages, refer unapologetically to the reality of angels. Would it not cast doubt on the reliability of the Bible, if the existence of angels was fiction?

B. Testimony Of Reason

It is natural for man to believe in angels. The majority of Christians and non-Christians do. People have always entertained the existence of powerful, spiritual beings. God made animals which are completely physical. He made humans who are partly physical and partly spiritual. It is reasonable to conclude he made angels who are completely spiritual. The doctrine of angels is very important. It serves to remind humans that they are not the highest accomplishment of creation. It clarifies how God is in constant contact with the world. It reveals the means He uses to care for the needs of man.

II. DOCTRINE OF ANGELS

Angels are the subject of art, poetry, and song. Humans have entertained their presence for thousands of years. They are part and parcel of nursery literature, religious story, and Christian

faith. Who, then, are these celestial beings? What do they do?

A. Nature Of Angels

The Bible is quite clear. Angels are mentioned almost three hundred times in Scripture. They are unique in nature and unparalleled in character. They have a special place in the plan of God.

1. They Are Created. Angels were created by the Lord, Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 148:2-5. They apparently were created before the creation of man. For, the serpent, a fallen angel, was the tempter in the Garden of Eden. It seems likely, therefore, that the rebellion of Satan and his comrades occurred before God made human beings, Revelation 12:7-9. Though both angels and humans are created, they are different from one another. God created Adam and Eve from whence the rest of humanity came. Angels do not reproduce. They exist because the Lord created each one of them separately. This is likely why salvation was provided for fallen man but not for fallen angels. Christ was joined to all of mankind by taking on their nature in the incarnation, Hebrews 2:14-17. In the case of angels, that was not possible.

2. They Are Spirits. Angels do not have bodies—as “body” is usually understood—though from time to time they assume human form, Genesis 19:1,2; Hebrews 13:2. They always appear as men—never women—when fashioned in the flesh. They are hidden from the human eye, II Kings 6:17, though they apparently have “spiritual bodies,” I Corinthians 15:44. They are like the wind—invisible yet real. Angels are called “spirits,” Hebrews 1:14. The term “angels” describes what they do. The word “spirits” describes what they are. Because they lack physical bodies, they do not marry, Matthew 22:30, nor do they die, Luke 20:34-36.

3. They Are Superhuman. Angels are wiser than man, II Samuel 14:17,20, though they do not know everything, Matthew 24:36. Angels are more righteous than humans, Psalm 103:20,21; Matthew 6:10, yet they are capable of sinning, Job 4:17-19; II Peter 2:4. Angels are stronger than man, Zechariah 12:7,8, though they are not omnipotent, II Peter 2:10b,11. Angels are superior to humankind, Psalm 8:3-5, but they are still subject to God. Angels are superhuman but not super divine.

4. They Are Innumerable. There are countless celestial messengers. “*Myriads of holy ones*” accompany the Lord, Deuteronomy 33:2. A myriad is a very large (though indefinite) number. Thousands upon thousands attend God, “*ten thousand times ten thousand stand before Him*,” Daniel 7:10; cf. Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 5:11. Although an exact amount is never mentioned, there is obviously an enormous number of angels in the heavenly host.

5. They Are Organized. The Bible strongly suggests that the angels have different responsibilities and different levels of authority. Enough information can be gathered from the inspired text to flesh out the parameters of their organization.

(a) Differences In Occupation. Apparently the angels are assigned different tasks. The angels engaged in these tasks have different designations.

(1) Seraphim. The term “seraphim” means “burning ones.” They are mentioned only once in Scripture, Isaiah 6:2,3. They hover around the throne of God in heaven, I Kings 22:19. These angels constantly proclaim the glory of the Lord. Their task is to ceaselessly praise His holy name, Psalm 148:2.

(2) Cherubim. The word “cherubim” means “plowing ones.” They appear to be the “blue collar” laborers. These angels serve the Lord on earth, Genesis 3:24. Their work is as important as their heavenly counterparts—the seraphim. They are employed by God to guard His precious earthly possessions, Psalm 91:11.

(b) Differences In Rank. The angelic host also has different levels of authority. Instead of a disorganized crowd, the angels are a coordinated company.

(1) Archangel. The title “archangel,” which occurs only a couple of times in Scripture, means “chief messenger,” I Thessalonians 4:16. Michael was an archangel, Jude 9. He seems to be a guardian of the saints. He helped Daniel, Daniel 10:13; 12:1. He was a warrior, a commander of warrior angels, Revelation 12:7-9. He fought the wicked. He rescued the righteous.

(2) Angel. All angels are servants of God. They are unseen agents of divine activity. Each angel has a particular mission, a specific assignment. The angels are employed in numberless ways by the Lord to assist man. The only one of this group mentioned by name is Gabriel. He seems to be the angelic interpreter of prophecy, the revealer of the purposes of God, Daniel 8:15-19; 9:21-23; Luke 1:26-38.

B. Purpose Of Angels

Angels are “*ministering spirits*,” Hebrews 1:14; cf. Matthew 4:11. They are singers in the heavenly throne room and messengers on the earthly foot stool. They follow the commands of God. Their assignments embrace time and eternity. Their influence is felt in both personal and national affairs. The world is in closer touch with heaven than it realizes.

1. Relative To God. The angels stand ready to do the bidding of Jehovah. His will is their passion, Psalm 103:20,21; Matthew 6:10.

(a) Worship. Some of the angels worship God day and night, Isaiah 6:1-3; Luke 2:13,14; Revelation 5:11,12. Their anthems of praise echo through the halls of heaven in an unending display of boundless gratitude. This is the privilege of the seraphim.

(b) Service. Other angels announce His instructions. They communicate His will, Acts 7:53; Hebrews 2:2,3a, and administer His judgment, II Samuel 24:16; II Kings 19:35; Psalm 35:4-6. This is the job of the cherubim.

2. Relative To Nations. There is no room for doubt. The Scriptures are quite clear. Angels are shaping the course of history among the nations of the world.

(a) Corrupt Evil Nations. The fallen angel (satan), also called “*the prince of this world*,” John 12:31; 14:30, leads people astray. He distorts the vision of nations, II Corinthians 4:4. He is the “*spirit that is now at work in those who are disobedient*,” Ephesians 2:1,2. He is the mastermind behind their fiendish behavior, Ephesians 6:12. Wicked angels corrupt evil nations, I Chronicles 21:1; II Chronicles 18:18-21.

(b) Protect Righteous Nations. In view of the corrupting actions of satan, it is heartening to realize that good angels are dispatched to righteous nations. They are entrusted to bring wholesome influences to bear on those countries that pursue righteousness. They “*deliver*” those who follow the Lord, Daniel 12:1.

3. Relative To Saints. Angels are present in daily life. How can humans know? It is not uncommon for the saints to feel distressed—alone, abandoned, and on their own. The righteous may not experience the nudge of angles. They may not hear their encouraging voices. They may not see their footprints in history. But these invisible helpers are close by, Isaiah 63:9; Hebrews 12:22. It behooves the believer to trust in these celestial messengers.

(a) Help The Church. Angels are spectators in the grim struggle of persecuted Christians, I Corinthians 4:9. They watch over the assembled congregation of saints, I Corinthians 11:10. They observe the conduct of ministers in the body of Christ, I Timothy 5:21. However, angels are not simply passive bystanders. They are interested helpers sent to rescue the godly, Psalm 91:11,12; Acts 12:11.

(b) Preserve The Saints. Believers need not be overwhelmed. The devil cannot tear them out of the loving arms of the Father, John 17:9-12; Romans 8:35-38. The followers of Jesus can stand their ground against the devious schemes of satan, Ephesians 6:10-18. Some day we will be amazed at all the assistance these celestial servants provided us, Psalm 34:7. For the angels attend to the welfare of the saints in life, Matthew 18:10, in death, Luke 16:22, and in the resurrection, Matthew 24:30,31.

4. Relative To Sinners. Anyone who defies the Lord will find himself in the stern grip of avenging angels, Acts 12:23. Angels can distinguish the wheat from the weeds. They are not (and cannot) be fooled, II Thessalonians 1:5-8; Jude 14,15. Their work of administering justice will be accurate, thorough, and irresistible, Psalm 78:49; Hebrews 2:1-3a.

III. VALUE OF THE DOCTRINE OF ANGELS

A study of angels reveals the boundless resources of heaven. These powerful, ministering servants of God are everywhere. They are deployed around the clock to walk beside those who do the will of God.

A. Strengthens Faith

The battle may be overwhelming. The struggle may seem endless. But, in the middle of the fray, angels offer a hand, encourage the weary, protect those in danger, Matthew 26:47-53; cf. Genesis 48:15,16; Exodus 23:20.

B. Teaches Humility

Angels are faster than man, Daniel 9:21. They are stronger than humans, Psalm 103:20; II Peter 2:11; Revelation 5:2; 10:1; 18:21. They are wiser than earthlings, II Samuel 14:20. They are awesome in splendor, Matthew 28:1-3; Revelation 18:1. Given whom they are and what they do, it is humbling to realize these wonderful beings work tirelessly on our behalf. They gladly perform their unnoticed (and often unappreciated) service for us who are considerably beneath them. Our only claim on their good will is being children of the same Father.

C. Stabilizes Hope

Relying on angels will supply greater hope in times of temptation. It will broaden the vision of the possibilities for the future. It will encourage the faint hearted in the heat of battle. Angels attend to human needs. We do not owe them worship, Colossians 2:18; cf. Revelation 19:9,10; 22:8,9. Their glory commands our respect. It does not demand our veneration. They are under the jurisdiction of heaven (in the same way we are). Angels help God fulfill His promises to man, Exodus 33:1,2. They help man fulfill his obligations to God.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEMONS

The term “*devil*” means “slanderer.” The word “*satan*” means “adversary.” These expressions refer to a created, superhuman, evil being. In Scripture, he is described as a rebel of God and an enemy of man. Several other designations are applied to this cunning champion of sin: “*tempter*,” Matthew 4:3, “*evil one*,” Matthew 13:19, “*murderer*” and “*father of lies*,” John 8:44, “*Belial*,” II Corinthians 6:15, (which means a “*troublemaker*,” I Samuel 30:22, or a “*scoundrel*,” Proverbs 6:12-14), “*Abaddon*” or “*Appollyon*,” Revelation 9:11, (both meaning “*destroyer*”), and “*deceiver*,” Revelation 12:9. Obviously, the devil is a wicked critter. At first glance, it seems inconceivable that one who was privileged to be in heaven could turn against God. But it happened, Revelation 12:7-9. Many deny the validity of this whole idea. They call the doctrine of demons a fraud. The devil is pleased. He smirks. This is his best trick. When he convinces us that he is not real, he is free to do his malicious deeds undetected.

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Jesus believed the devil existed. The Lord was tempted by him, Matthew 4:1. He quoted Scripture to him, Matthew 4:7. He followed him to “*a very high mountain*,” Matthew 4:8. The Son of God had a conversation with the deceiver. He heard his voice, Matthew 4:3,6,9. He sharply rebuked his intentions, Matthew 4:10. These are odd verses if the devil is not real. To whom was Christ talking? If satan is a myth, this whole scenario becomes a strange incident! If the tempter is a folk tale, the sanity of Jesus is called into question.

A. Reality Of Satan

There is not the slightest hint in the Bible that satan is a hoax. There is not a single trace of hesitancy concerning the evil one. His existence is certain. No exaggeration is made. No extravagance issued. Demonology in the Bible is free of extreme pagan beliefs. It is practical in purpose. It is sound in presentation. When people deny the reality of satan, they jeopardize the truthfulness of Christ. They impugn the reliability of Scripture.

1. Testimony Of Scripture. Throughout the Bible, satan is an accuser, Job 1:6-12; Zechariah 3:1. He incites disobedience, I Chronicles 21:1. He takes the word of God from the hearts of men, Luke 8:11,12. He seduces people to do evil, John 13:2; Ephesians 6:11; I Timothy 3:6,7; II Timothy 2:24-26; I Peter 5:8. The devil possesses “*the power of death*,” Hebrews 2:14. But, though satan is the ruler of this world, Christ overpowered him in the cross, Colossians 2:15. Now he is confined to the earth, Revelation 12:9.

2. Testimony Of Reason. A belief in evil spirits is common around the world. It is as persistent and widespread as belief in God, in angels, and in life after death. The universality of such a conviction must be a divine disclosure. Still some people attempt to explain this worldwide belief as a chance occurrence. However, a causeless effect is bad logic. Others try to explain this prevalent idea as a human invention. That is more sinister. How does one account for an insane idea being accepted by the majority of sane humanity? There seems to be only one valid conclusion. Belief in satan and demons (like other religious convictions) is ultimately traceable to a special revelation from God.

B. Identity Of Satan

The Scriptures are all but silent about the origin of the devil. Discussion focuses on his existence and his evil influence. The Bible says fellowship with him is reckless, I Corinthians 10:20; Ephesians 5:11. The believer is encouraged to stay alert, I Peter 5:8,9. Christians are to oppose him, Ephesians 6:10-12; I Timothy 6:12.

1. Spurious Guesses. Many are skeptical. They question the doctrine of demons. They reject the inspired word. They offer alternate explanations.

(a) Natural Diseases. Modern science often says wicked spirits are actually mental disorders. Doctors frequently view demons in the Bible as personifications of psychological disturbances. That is preposterous. Did 2,000 pigs suddenly become mentally ill? Mark 5:1-13. Demon possession, severe pain, mental disease, and paralysis are clearly differentiated in the word of God, Matthew 4:24; Acts 8:7.

(b) Spirits Of The Dead. In the third world, demons are thought to be spirits of dead ancestors. These ancestral spirits afflict the living. This is the heathen way of explaining physical illness. Certainly there are occasional references in Scripture to pagan beliefs, Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalms 106:37. These references are couched in contexts of disapproval. Spirits of dead humans attacking the bodies of living humans is not a teaching of the Bible. Demons are “*evil spirits*,” Luke 8:29, who enter “*into*” people, Luke 8:30, “*seize*” them, Mark 9:17,18, and “*possess*” them, Luke 4:33. Demons are not spirits of dead people.

2. Inspired Statements. There are various ideas regarding the origin of demons. The Bible gives a few hints. These hints are intriguing. However, the reader must be careful. It is easy to mishandle the inspired text on this subject.

(a) Offspring Of Angels. A very ancient theory (first mentioned before the birth of Jesus) claims to explain the origin of demons. The theory is based on a passage of Scripture, Genesis 6:1,2. According to this theory, the “*sons of God*” were “*angels*.” The “*daughters of men*” were humans. They were attracted to each other. Their offspring became the “*nephilim*,” Genesis 6:4. The word “*nephilim*” means “*fallen ones*.” Supposedly these “*fallen*”

ones” are the demons. But such a view has difficulties. In the first place, the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men” are the people who lived before the flood. They, along with the “nephilim,” all drowned in the flood. In the second place, the “sons of God” could not be angels (as this theory contends). For angels are spirit beings. They do not have physical bodies. So, as a consequence, they do not marry, Matthew 22:30. On both counts, then, the “fallen ones” cannot be the demons.

(b) Rebels Of Heaven. In the primal rebellion of satan, the devil was motivated by conceit, I Timothy 3:6. His pride rubbed off on other angels. In his rebellion, he drew away many other celestial beings, Revelation 12:4. The angels that fell with him can be divided into two groups: those that are fallen and free and those that are fallen and fettered.

(1) Fallen And Free Angels. The fallen and free angels roam the “heavenly realms” under the command of satan, Matthew 25:41; Ephesians 6:12. At one time, his territory included both heaven and earth, Job 1:6-12. In the ministry of Christ, his activity became restricted to the earth, Luke 10:18. The fallen and free angels “work in those who are disobedient,” Ephesians 2:2. They do their final mischief on earth, Revelation 20:3,7-10.

(2) Fallen And Fettered Angels. The fallen and fettered angels seem to be guilty of an enormous (but unspecified) wickedness (beyond their original rebellion). They are confined to “gloomy dungeons” until the judgment, II Peter 2:4; Jude 6. Therefore, while the fallen and fettered angels are “bound in everlasting chains,” the fallen and free angels scurry about as the “powers of this dark world,” Ephesians 6:12. All fallen angels are members of the kingdom of satan, Matthew 12:26. The fallen and free angels are the demons.

C. Demon Possession

The Bible frequently mentions demon possession. No idea has prompted greater speculation. No subject has produced more skepticism. Demon possession is a strange phenomenon to the western mind.

1. Possibility Of Demon Possession. It is commonly believed that a person can be influenced by other people. It is frequently demonstrated in hypnosis that one individual can take control of another willing individual. Surely, then, it is possible for satan to influence the minds of those who consent to his domination. Is this not the same premise for understanding the influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of yielding saints? Romans 8:9.

(a) Past Occurrences. There was an outbreak of demon activity during the ministry of Jesus, Mark 1:23-27,32-34,39; 3:11; 7:24-30; 9:17-27. The Lord delegated the power of exorcism to His apostles, Mark 3:13-15. First century Christians possessed similar power, Mark 16:15-18. Christ came to destroy the work of the devil, John 12:31; Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14; I John 3:8. It is no surprise that He collided head-on with satan. However,

demon possession is not limited to the ministry of the Messiah. For an “*evil spirit*” descended on Abimelech, Judges 9:23. And King Saul was tormented by “*evil spirits*,” I Samuel 16:14. Though not as frequent and, perhaps, as spectacular, as in the time of Christ, demonism occurred before His earthly sojourn. It continued after it, too, Acts 5:16; 8:7; 16:16-18; 19:12. Moreover, the work of evil spirits endures to this day, I Timothy 4:1.

(b) Present Occurrences. In the age of science, it is frequently assumed that demons are myths entertained by unenlightened minds. Therefore, demons are not thought to be real. This conclusion casts doubt on Scripture. It makes the Christian faith a quaint museum relic. It is shortsighted. It is a hasty inference that neglects to take all the facts into consideration. Demons are notoriously clever. Satan is wise, cunning, and deceitful, II Thessalonians 2:9,10. He adapts his stratagems to the thoughts of men, his activities to the cultures that prevail. He can prowl like a “*roaring lion*,” I Peter 5:8. He can masquerade like an “*angel of light*,” II Corinthians 11:14. Missionaries in third world countries regularly witness what the Bible calls demon possession. They report people passing into temporary abnormal states, convulsing, foaming at the mouth, and taking on other personalities, Mark 9:17-20; Luke 8:27-31; 9:39. The cases of present day demon activity surface in those places unaffected by the conclusions of modern science. These manifestations disappear when the Christian faith is accepted and lived. To be sure, satan is still present. He merely works in other subtle ways which are hidden from human sight. He continues to blind the minds of unbelievers to the light of truth in Christ Jesus, II Corinthians 4:4. If a person never meets the devil, it may be that he is going in the same direction.

2. Theories About Demon Possession. The evidence for demon possession is strong. Nevertheless, theories supporting the non-existence of demons persist. They scarcely merit serious consideration. But, because they are still bantered about, they will be given a passing mention.

(a) Accommodation Theory. Some folks say Jesus did not really drive out demons. The exorcism narratives were written to comply with the prevailing ignorance of the first century. They were simply accommodations to ancient superstition. That is hardly a harmless theory. It challenges the integrity of Christ. For, He not only spoke of demons to the multitudes in public, but discussed them with His disciples in private, Matthew 17:14-21. Was He sanctioning a myth? Did He allow His disciples to record a falsehood? Such a claim is inconsistent with His denunciation of other (less important) superstitions, Matthew 23:16-22.

(b) Hallucination Theory. Some people believe that demon possession is a psychological delusion. Sick people become distraught. They eventually suffer crippling visions. They lapse into emotional frenzies that cause them to imagine themselves possessed. This is a clever idea. Yet it fails to explain how a person, so bereft of reason, can, in the same instance, acknowledge the deity of Jesus, Mark 5:6-8; Luke 4:33,34. It also fails to explain the violent effect on the swine, Mark 5:13. The theory that says demon possession is a hallucination turns

out to be an absurd delusion itself.

3. Nature Of Demon Possession. Demons are real. Demon possession is real. The phenomenon is not a fluke. It happens. It cannot be explained away. Rather, it needs to be explained.

(a) Responsibility Of The Possessed. Demon possession seems to be the responsibility of the possessed. For the demons can be successfully resisted, I Corinthians 10:12,13; Ephesians 6:11; James 4:7; I Peter 5:8,9. When a person—believer or nonbeliever—lets his guard down, the evil one is allowed to “*fill his heart,*” Acts 5:1-3. The victim is responsible. We are cautioned, then, to affirm his existence and resist his attacks, I Peter 5:8,9.

(b) Relationship To Disease. The Scripture carefully distinguishes demon possession and physical disease, Matthew 8:16. Yet those possessed by demons often manifested symptoms of physical affliction, Matthew 9:32,33; 12:22; Mark 9:17,18. Therefore, demon possession can produce physical complications, but physical complications are not always a sign of demon possession. The cause, in every case, may be hard to determine. Demon possession does not yield to medical analysis. It must not be declared impossible—no matter how inexplicable to the human mind—since all spiritual operations are beyond empirical understanding. In other words, no one has the right to explain away the plain expressions of Scripture in order to reduce them to his own ignorance.

(c) Casting Out The Evil Spirits. The Lord healed many who were demon possessed. His method was uniquely simple, instantaneous, and successful. Jesus merely spoke a command. The demons obeyed, Matthew 8:16; Mark 9:25. His followers were instructed to cast them out “*in His name,*” Mark 16:17. The use of His name implied a faith in Him. Consequently, when a group of Jewish exorcists invoked His name, they were beaten and bloodied by the one who was demon possessed, Acts 19:13-16. Apparently, the exorcists employed His name without believing in Him. However, if one agreed with His cause, they were allowed to cast out demons “*in His name,*” Luke 9:49,50. Hence, in the latter situation, faith was the difference.

II. DOCTRINE OF DEMONS

The Bible clearly affirms the existence of demons. It teaches the reader about the nature, activity, and doom of these fallen angels. The lessons learned are rich in eternal ramifications.

A. Nature Of Demons

There is a substantial body of facts about the nature of these evil ones. When carefully examined, they reveal the spiritual, intellectual, and moral qualities of the companions of satan.

1. Spiritual Qualities. The demons are spiritual beings, Matthew 8:16; Luke 10:17-20. Since they are spirits, they do not have horns, hoofs, or forked-tails. In their spirit state, they cannot be seen by humans. Occasionally, they take on physical properties. They become visible. Yet the presence of evil spirits is most often detected by the intense suffering they inflict, Mark 9:25-27, the gross deception they cause, II Timothy 2:25,26. The devil is a skilled artist. He paints wickedness in seductively beautiful colors.

2. Intellectual Qualities. Evil spirits possess superhuman knowledge. They are aware of their impending doom, Matthew 8:29. They know Jesus is “*the Holy One of God*,” Mark 1:24. They realize He is the “*Son of the Most High God*,” Mark 5:7. In spite of this superior knowledge, they deceive the unsuspecting, I Timothy 4:1. They deny the incarnation, I John 4:1-3. They have keen insight but devious behavior. For instance, they worship the Lord, Mark 3:11, simply because they are afraid of Him, James 2:19.

3. Moral Qualities. Demons are completely corrupt. No wonder they are called “*evil spirits*,” Matthew 10:1; Acts 8:7. Some of them seem to be more wicked than others, Matthew 12:45. People who submit to their persuasion are plunged into a depraved state. Those overcome by evil spirits have deranged thoughts. They go around naked. They frequent places of gross impurity, Luke 8:27. Evil spirits inflict severe pain, Mark 9:17,18. Demons are what their name implies—celestial beings committed to harming terrestrial creatures.

B. Activity Of Demons

The devil and his angels are tireless in their pursuit of evil. Their enthusiasm for wickedness has no bounds. Their diligence to deceive takes no vacation, Job 1:6,7; 2:1,2. They constantly oppose God and oppress man.

1. Oppose God. The primary occupation of satan involves opposition to the will of God, Matthew 13:36-39. He enticed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Genesis 3:1-5. He tempted Christ in the desert, Matthew 4:1-11. He pushed Judas to betray Jesus, Luke 22:3,4. He maneuvered Peter into denying the Lord, Luke 22:31,32. Opposition to God is his trademark, II Thessalonians 2:3,4.

2. Oppress Man. Evil spirits use nature to afflict humanity. Satan employed lightning, wind, and disease to distress Job, Job 1:12,16,19; 2:7. He crippled a woman with “*a spirit of infirmity*” for eighteen years, Luke 13:10-16. He seduces the saints, John 13:27; Acts 5:3; I Thessalonians 3:5. Satan and the demons work together to inflict havoc on the Church. They are bent on troubling those who Christ wants to save, Acts 10:38. The Lord defeats their evil schemes. He actually uses them to further His intentions. Through them, He punishes the ungodly, I Kings 22:23; Psalms 78:49. He also disciplines the godly (who have sinned), I Corinthians 5:5; I Timothy 1:20. Demons are a clear demonstration of the character and consequence of evil, Matthew 8:28,29.

C. Doom Of Demons

In spite of inflicting widespread mayhem, the devil and his malignant comrades are under the control of God. Their influence is limited. The sphere of their operation is set. Like a chained animal, they are confined, restricted, and detained. Their doom is certain.

1. Abyss: The Intermediate State. The demons are aware of their doom, Matthew 8:29. During history, some of them were delivered to the abyss, Luke 8:31. When they sinned, after their initial rebellion, they were sent to a place of confinement—a dark pit (or dungeon), II Peter 2:4; Jude 6. The first century Greeks called this place “*Tartarus*.” These are the fallen and fettered demons.

2. Ghenna: The Eternal State. The abyss holds its wicked tenants until the Judgment Day. At that time, the abyss will surrender its inmates to the eternal fires of hell, Matthew 25:41. This is the terrifying doom dreaded by the fallen and free demons, Mark 1:24. The fallen and fettered demons will be released temporarily from the abyss at the end of history, Revelation 20:3,7-9. But, after a short interval, they will be hurled into eternal torment, Revelation 20:10. All of this is certain. God has spoken. His words will come to pass.

II. EVALUATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF DEMONS

There are still objections raised to the teaching about demons. Notwithstanding, there are values in accepting what the Scripture says. It is profitable to look at both sides of this issue.

A. Objections To The Doctrine of Demons

Several criticisms are leveled at the teachings of the Bible about satan. These criticisms should be taken seriously. If they are allowed to stand, the inspiration of Scripture is destined to fall.

1. Seems Irrational. Many continue to deny the doctrine of the devil. They cannot accept that one so good could become so bad. Can conceit cause a person to fall so far? Can one act of rebellion become a permanent involvement in evil? We do not know the circumstances surrounding the fall of satan. However, we are aware of the power of single actions that permanently change the personality of people. All of us have seen or heard what the first glass of wine, the first experience with drugs, and the first thrill of gambling does to some people. One act can lead to addiction. Thus, the fall of satan is not irrational after all. Neither is it irrational to pray “*lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one*,” Matthew 6:13.

2. Seems Inconsistent. A few individuals find the idea of the devil unbelievable. Is not God good? How could He create one so bad? The answer lies in considering the creation of humans. They started out as saints but quickly ended up sinners. Was God the cause? The seduction of evil is powerful. Sin is the choice of man. Can it not be the choice of angels? Sin

is not inconsistent with the benevolence of God among us. Why, then, would it be among them? The devil is not a commentary on the inconsistency of God but on the power of sin.

3. Seems Impossible. Others feel that the doctrine of demons is absurd. How could one so wise be so stupid? How could satan foment a rebellion that he knew was a hopeless venture? Indeed, it does appear ridiculous. Yet, on second thought, why do humans do the same thing? People gratify their passions knowing that such behavior involves present misery and future ruin. There is no amount of knowledge that ensures right conduct. Knowledge alone does not protect one from evil. Commitment to the Lord does, Romans 6:6,7; I John 2:14,24; 3:9,10. If Christ fills our hearts, there will be no room for the devil.

4. Seems Dangerous. Occasionally someone objects to the doctrine of the devil because it transfers the blame for human sin to a celestial tempter. But Scripture does not allow us to dodge responsibility. Temptation is not an excuse for wickedness, I Corinthians 10:13. The devil cannot be blamed. Sin is the fault of the sinner, James 1:13-15. Satan can entice. He cannot compel. The danger lies in denying the existence of the devil. For denial opens the door to his conniving ways.

B. Values Of The Doctrine of Demons

The devil is real. Demons exist. The truth is beyond dispute. Argument should cease. Objection must stop. Enough has been said to make satan and his buddies more reasonable to believe than to deny.

1. Illustrates The Nature Of Sin. The study of demons exposes the true character of sin. It shows the depth of ruin it can bring on man. Satan was once pure. He fell from grace. God did not create him wicked. He chose to become sinful. Satan is a spirit. He cannot blame his duplicity on the flesh. Moreover, satan shows us that sin is not always a temporary digression. It is not always a forgivable act, Hebrews 10:26,27.

2. Inspires Caution Toward Evil. The study of demons causes us to fear the subtle hints of temptation. Why? These seductive suggestions are most likely the work of evil spirits. As long as the tempter is chasing us, we can be certain he has not caught us. When, however, he stops seducing us, we should be duly advised. Likely, we are already trapped in his snare.

3. Drives the Faithful To God. The doctrine of the devil shows us that salvation is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. God alone can rescue us from the clutches of the evil one, I Peter 1:3-5. The believer must open his heart to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He must be so full of the Spirit that another spirit cannot find room, Matthew 12:43-45. The only way to deal with the devil is to treat him roughly. Satan must be so vigorously rejected that he will look elsewhere for a place to reside.

CHAPTER FIVE

HUMANS

What is man? Is he created by God? Is he the product of evolution? Does it matter? Why even ask the question? The question is asked because the question will not go away. Man is a thinking being. He ponders his origin. He wonders about his purpose. He contemplates his destiny. No one is comfortable living life without understanding himself. No one is ready to live life unless he knows from whence he came and where he is going.

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

We begin this search at the beginning. We start with the question of origin. How did the human family come into existence? Since evolution is widely believed, we will examine that theory first.

A. Evolution

Some people claim that all the forms of life which now exist came from one cell in the ocean. Through a connected series of changes, this cell developed into all the bugs, bushes, and baboons on earth. During this long process, these changes were completely natural. In other words, there was no supernatural intelligence involved. There was no divine power present. Could that cell on its own morph into all of the intricate varieties of life we now observe on our planet? The Bible teaches that from the beginning there were groups of living things—such as fish, frogs, horses, dogs, plants and trees. Each of these “*kinds*” of life was created to reproduce within its particular category of life form, Genesis 1:11,12,21,24,25. Though they vary within their type, these life forms remain the same species. For example, horses do not become dogs. And fish do not become birds. “*According to their kind*” is a biological principle that cannot be broken. Even the most ambitious efforts of man have not altered this law of nature. The theory of evolution is suspect. Still it struggles to be heard.

1. Comparative Anatomy. Evidence to support evolution is supposedly found in comparing various animals. Similarities in skeleton, muscle, and nerve structure are found in all of them. The evolutionist thinks this proves they have a common ancestor. But that “proof” has major weaknesses. First, similarity in anatomy supports creation. For, since all animals were designed to live in a similar environment, God made them with similar structures. Second, comparative anatomy furnishes too many ancestors. The duck-billed platypus is a case in point. It is similar to a bird as well as an animal. It has a bill, makes a nest, and lays eggs. It also has four legs, a fur coat, and claws. Resemblance in anatomy is supposed to indicate closeness in

relationship. In the case of the duck-billed platypus, there are too many similarities and too many ancestors. The theory of evolution is embarrassed by the facts of comparative anatomy.

2. Blood Tests. Evolutionists also rely on a blood test to prove common origin. The serum of human blood is injected into an animal to obtain an anti-human serum. This anti-human serum is mixed with the blood of various animals. In each case, a heavy white precipitate is formed. The amount of precipitate varies from animal to animal. The evolutionist contends that less precipitate indicates a greater distance from man. More precipitate indicates a closer proximity to man. This so-called evidence is weak at best and inconsistent at worst. For, the blood of the whale bone whale, one kind of baboon, a tiger, an antelope, and man yield the same amount of precipitate. Such similarity is confusing. Moreover, a sheep and a human have exactly the same composition in their thyroid gland secretion. The milk of a donkey is more like human milk than any other animal. The plague only occurs in rats and humans. Malta fever only affects goats and people. Obviously similarity proves too much. Therefore, it proves nothing.

3. Comparative Embryology. All embryos start from a single cell. In the process of development, so evolutionists say, that cell passes through the same stages as the evolution of all species. For instance, the embryo of a human begins as a single cell. It passes into the likeness of a fish. Then it develops into a reptile before becoming a mammal. From the mammal stage, the embryo develops into an ape. And, finally, it becomes a human. This so-called evidence is more imagination than reality. For, in fact, the human embryo does not pass through these successive stages of development. And, those stages which vaguely correspond to the theory do so out of chronological order. Indeed, there are parallels in the formation of creatures. These similarities point to a common plan used by a supreme Creator. A design points to a Designer (not to evolution).

4. Unused Organs. Many human organs were once assumed to be non-essential. Evolutionists believed they were required for earlier ancestral development. The list of excess baggage once included a hundred and eighty such organs. Medical knowledge subsequently reduced that list to three: appendix, third eyelid, and outer ear muscle. Further research has recently discovered the function of the remaining three organs! Notwithstanding, if there were useless organs, how would that be evidence of evolutionary progress? The problem for evolution is not losing the use of some organs but the acquiring of new ones. The list of unused organs fails to do that.

5. Anthropological Insight. Scientists continue to search for the missing-link. Knowledge obtained from fossils is very fragmentary. Bones accumulate in museums. These bones are sorted, rearranged, and studied over and over. Guesses are advanced. Proof is elusive. Evolution is no closer to a solid breakthrough than it was a century ago. For example, the APE MAN OF JAVA consists of four scraps: a skull cap, a leg bone, and two teeth. These pieces were found fifty feet apart. There is no certainty that they belong to the same skeleton. The

PITDOWN MAN is equally as dubious. A small skull fragment, a jaw bone, and a tooth were found in the same “general” area. Again no one knows if these fragments belong to the same being. For, in the same vicinity, researchers found bones of an elephant, hippopotamus, beaver, horse, and a deer. A similar confusion surrounds the HEIDELBERG MAN. Scientists (who believed in evolution) took a few bone fragments, a bucket of plaster, and a lot of imagination to fashion a half-human and half-animal creature. The scientists disagreed in private about their conclusions. In public, they spoke confidently about discovering the missing-link. Thousands of people took them at their word. Faith was abandoned. A fraud was perpetuated. The missing-link was not found. Indeed, the whole evolutionary chain is missing.

6. Genetic Witness. The science of genetics is a natural laboratory for the study of evolution. It should be possible to discover the laws for the development of new forms of life. The application of these laws should result in the formation of new species. Two methods have been employed. First, changes were affected by artificial stimulation. Mutations occurred through variation in temperature, use of x-rays, and exposure to ultraviolet light. These changes would continue only under controlled laboratory conditions. They did not reproduce themselves indefinitely. They quickly became extinct in the absence of human supervision. Second, changes were also affected by cross-breeding. These modifications always impaired the offspring. The impairments included a decrease in stamina, fertility, and disease-resistance. They involved an increase in the malformation of some organs. This is not a proof of evolution. For these mutations are not new species. They are injuries that quickly go extinct when left unsupervised. And, even if these changes continued, they would represent the survival of the frailest rather than survival of the fittest. Nature has placed an insurmountable barrier in the path of evolution. The species remain constant. “*According to their kind*” is an unbreakable law. The straying variations within each species are swiftly removed by sterility.

7. Geological Record. If the theory of evolution is true, fossil remains should reflect the development of the various life forms. But the successive strata of fossil deposits do not show an evolutionary progression. The earliest life forms are the same as the present life forms. There are no transitional fossils. There is no evidence of any change of one species to another species. Rather fossil remains show a sudden appearance of life. First, there are remains of plants and trees. These are followed by the remains of fish and birds. Then the fossils of reptiles and animals are found. And, finally, there is the sudden appearance of human fossils. The abruptness and order of appearance corresponds exactly with the biblical record, Genesis 1:11,12,20,21,24,27. The witness of the rocks is irrefutable. It does not speak the language of the evolutionist. Evolution does not agree with the facts that are available. Creation does. Is it not time to put our faith in the Creator?

B. Creation

God created all things, Acts 4:24. The creation is the “*work of His fingers*,” Psalm 8:3. All things exist because He “*commanded*” their existence, Psalm 148:5; cf. Isaiah 37:16; Acts 14:15; 17:24.

1. God Created Humans. Man is not the product of natural forces. Humans were created by God. They were made in His “likeness,” Genesis 1:26. Mankind reflects His “image,” Genesis 1:27. Hence, creation did not begin with a cell. It began with a Creator.

2. Humanity Came From A Single Pair. Some people believe there were originally different centers of population. Various types of humans—Africans, Asians, Europeans, and Native Americans—were created and placed on separate continents. This makes it easier to explain the different races. But it contradicts Scripture. The Bible says the entire human family descended from a single pair, Genesis 1:27,28; 2:22; 3:20; 9:19; Acts 17:26. Human depravity through Adam and human salvation through Christ depend on humanity coming from a single pair, Romans 5:12,19; I Corinthians 15:21,22. These passages are corroborated by proofs from several academic disciplines.

(a) Proof From History. The history of nations can be traced to central Asia. The European nations came in successive migratory waves from the Asian continent. The North and South American Indians are migrants from the eastern hemisphere. Their route is unknown. Speculation points to a crossing of the Bering Straits between Russia and Alaska. Or, perhaps, the original immigrants crossed the Pacific Ocean (as some Polynesians have done by canoe in modern times).

(b) Proof From Language. The study of linguistics points to a common origin of all languages, Genesis 11:1. No discovery—ancient or modern—disproves the belief that humans received their original language skills from God. The most highly developed languages came first. The less complex methods of communication came afterward. Humans did not first speak in grunts and gestures. In the beginning, God gave man speech. Later, He altered their languages, Genesis 11:5-7. The ability to trace languages back to a common source is due to a common source originating them.

(c) Proof From Psychology. Humans possess similar mental and moral characteristics. They have a common tendency toward hate, jealousy, prejudice, and selfishness. They have a common capacity for love, justice, kindness, and belonging. They share a common belief in a creation, in an original innocence, and in a flood. They long for immortality. They divide time into weeks. They offer sacrifices to a higher power. All of these point to an original tradition which was handed down from generation to generation.

(d) Proof From Physiology. When the different races are compared, the results overwhelmingly suggest that humans constitute a single species. The differences in size, skin color, and skeleton are merely variations within the same species. All humans have the same body temperature, pulse count, and respiratory rate. They are subject to the same diseases. When the various races mate, they always have fertile offspring. Pregnancy is always nine months. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that all varieties of the human race were present in the first pair. The story of Adam and Eve is not a cute fairy tale. It is a grand truth.

II. DOCTRINE OF HUMANS

In the beginning, God deliberated about the creation of man, Genesis 1:26. He “formed” man from “*the dust of the ground*” like a potter, Genesis 2:7; cf. Job 10:8,9; Isaiah 64:8. He knitted him together like a weaver, Psalms 139:13-15. God skillfully made man. The results were “*very good*,” Genesis 1:31. Humans were magnificent creatures.

A. Physical Nature

When God breathed into humankind, man became a “*living being*,” (or, literally, “*a living soul*”), Genesis 2:7. Humans were created with physical, mental, and moral components.

1. Body. The human body came from the ground, Genesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 12:7. The body is like a tent, II Corinthians 5:1. It is a temporary dwelling of the spirit, I Corinthians 6:19. At death, the body returns to the soil, Genesis 3:19. “*The spirit returns to God who gave it*,” Ecclesiastes 12:7.

2. Spirit. The spirit animates the spiritual portion of man. It carries the imprint of the divine image. It is the part of man that differentiates him from the animals. God is spirit, John 4:24. Man has a spirit and a body. The animals only have bodies.

3. Soul. The soul is the union of the body and spirit. Man does not have a soul. He is a soul. While on the earth, man maintains a threefold connection. He is connected to the world, to himself, and to God. His body maintains the first connection. His soul maintains the second one. And his spirit maintains the third. Thus, when viewed holistically, man is described as “*spirit, soul, and body*,” I Thessalonians 5:23. The spirit is related to heaven. It is susceptible to divine influence, Galatians 6:18. The body is connected to the earth. It is susceptible to the influences of this world, Romans 6:12. As a combination of the body and spirit, the soul is caught in the middle. “*Therefore*,” the Scripture says, “*get rid of all moral filth...and humbly accept the word...which can save you*” (or, literally, “*can save your soul*”), James 1:21.

B. Mental Nature

The mental nature of man consists of three functions. The mind has the power to know, to feel, and to choose.

1. Intellect. The intellect is the capacity to think. It remembers or fails to remember, Jeremiah 3:16. It understands, Luke 24:45, or fails to understand, I Timothy 6:3,4. It is influenced by the senses. It judges things by rational deduction. It reacts to these stimuli to form thoughts, to reach conclusions. The mind can be corrupted, Romans 1:28; Colossians 2:8; I Timothy 6:5. It can also be renewed, Romans 12:2a.

2. Emotion. The emotional part of man feels. When stirred by the intellect, it feels joy or sorrow. Christianity is an incentive as well as a corrective for the emotions. The love of God and the sympathy of Christ can excite the noblest hope and the loftiest joy, Hebrews 4:15; I John 4:19. But these feelings can be stifled. Humans can grow numb to heaven. They can lose “*all sensitivity*” to the encouragement of God, Ephesians 4:17-19.

3. Will. The will is the self-determining component of man. It examines, II Corinthians 13:5. It chooses, Deuteronomy 30:19. It acts, John 13:17. The will directs the mind and the emotions. It allows or prohibits their use, Ecclesiastes 7:25. Thus, man has the power to accept or reject the indwelling work of God, Philippians 2:12,13.

C. Moral Nature

The moral nature of man discriminates between right and wrong. It is called the conscience. It passes judgment on the activities of man. It determines the goodness or badness of his behavior. Man must first enlighten his conscience. Then the conscience will “*bear witness*” or “*testify*” (namely, give feedback) regarding any decision made or action undertaken, Romans 2:15; 9:1; II Corinthians 1:12. It is infallible in its decrees. It always accurately recalls what it is instructed to remember. Conscience is not the voice of God. It is the voice of man speaking to himself. This voice issues an “*answer*,” an “*appeal*,” or a “*prompting*” to the moral consciousness. When the voice is followed, a “*clear*,” Acts 24:16; Hebrews 13:18, or “*good*” conscience results, Acts 23:1; I Timothy 1:5,19; I Peter 3:21. When the voice is ignored, the conscience becomes “*corrupted*,” Titus 1:15, or “*guilty*,” Hebrews 10:22. After continual abuse, it can be “*seared*,” I Timothy 4:2. In other words, the conscience cannot be forced or coerced to bear false testimony. Instead, the conscience is a moral compass. It nudges humans when the mental or emotional faculties veer off course.

III. ORIGINAL STATE OF HUMANS

When God created Adam and Eve, He was satisfied with His handiwork. He gave them a lovely home in a beautiful garden, Genesis 2:8,9. Life was great. Their pristine condition included both essentials and incidentals.

A. Essentials

The essentials are summed up in the synonymous terms “*image*” and “*likeness*” of God, Genesis 1:26,27; 5:1; 9:6. Seemingly, these words were intended to convey the high and noble standing humans occupied in creation, cf. Psalms 8:4,5. In other words, like God, man could think, feel, and decide.

1. Personhood. Man was created a self-conscious, self-determining entity. He was a free

moral agent. This affinity to God was never lost (though it was ignored). Since all humans are reflectors of God, every person deserves respect, James 3:9; I Peter 2:17a.

2. Holiness. God made man upright, Ecclesiastes 7:29. By virtue of his original holiness, man possessed a body and spirit that lived in harmony with each other. That harmony was eventually broken. Man chose evil. His innocence was lost, Genesis 3:8-13. Conflict arose. Sin became a staple on the menu of his life, Romans 8:5-8. Only God could restore a “*true righteousness*” in man, Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9,10.

B. Incidentals

Due to his closeness to God, man received exclusive privileges and extraordinary responsibilities. He was blessed with the capacity to commune with God and rule over creation.

1. Dominion Over Creation. The ability to think lifted humans above other creatures, Genesis 1:26; Psalms 8:6-8. In the beginning, the animals rendered voluntary subjection to man, Genesis 2:19,20a. Eventually that submission gave way to antagonism. “*Fear and dread*” filled all the lower creatures, Genesis 9:2. Though man was to rule over them, he was not to be cruel to them, Deuteronomy 22:4.

2. Communion With God. Adam and Eve were tutored by their Maker. The Lord regularly visited them in the garden. His instruction was carefully adjusted to their capacity. It was intended to preserve their innocence, Genesis 2:15-17. Yet, in spite of that assistance, in time, they lost their simple naiveté. Their worst nightmare began. The Lord drove them from the garden, Genesis 3:23. Notwithstanding, to this day, we still hope. We long to regain that lost fellowship. It is our enduring dream, Matthew 5:8; John 14:1-3.

(a) Test Of Character. The garden was an arena of testing. Humans cannot become ethically fit unless they exercise their moral muscle. Therefore, man was forbidden to eat from “*the tree of knowledge*,” Genesis 2:17. The fruit was not poisonous. Disobedience was. Man had to learn the value of following directions. He had to learn to recognize good by refusing evil, Hebrews 5:11-13.

(b) Source Of Immortality. “*The tree of life*” provided eternal life, Genesis 3:22. When the forbidden fruit was eaten, man sealed his fate. Sin closed the door. It prohibited access to the life-giving tree. Man lost his immortality. His rebellion had huge implications. He was “*banished*” from the garden, alienated from God, Genesis 3:23. Since that momentous disaster, humans have longed to regain what they forfeited, Revelation 22:14.

IV. FALL OF HUMANS

Adam and Eve disobeyed God. The Lord came to the garden for a visit. Things had changed. Man acted guilty, Genesis 3:8. God promptly asked them, *“Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”* Genesis 3:11. Though excuses were offered, the damage was done, Genesis 3:12,13. In order to grasp the significance of their error, it is necessary to examine the nature of the command.

A. Command Of God

A command expresses the will of God. It is enforced by His power. Without enforcement, a command is merely a wish. Without a penalty, it is like declaring war without an army. As a free moral agent, man could resist the command of God. But, in doing so, he incurred the consequences of disobedience.

1. Expresses His Will. The commands of heaven embody the rules of God. These rules are made to guide man, Psalm 119:97-104. The righteous delight in them, Psalm 1:1,2; 40:8. His ordinances lead to life, Proverbs 19:16. They are perfect, trustworthy, right, enlightening, and pure, Psalm 19:7,8. By them, we are warned. In keeping them, we are rewarded, Psalm 19:11. God issues no unnecessary commands.

2. Exposes His Power. The rules of heaven are enforced by the power of God. His purposes stand firm, Psalm 33:8-11. All disobedience is punished, Hebrews 2:1-3a. The commands of God remain in force even when humans do not want to keep them. They are like gravity. Ignoring the injunctions of God, like ignoring the forces of nature, leads to catastrophe.

3. Displays His Nature. The rules of God mirror the character of God. He does not change. His commands must not be changed, Deuteronomy 4:2; Joshua 1:7; Proverbs 30:5,6; I Corinthians 4:6a; Revelation 22:18,19. We must not dumb-down the commandments of God to accommodate the reluctant. Those who attempt to alter His instructions are attempting to alter God.

B. Nature Of Sin

The word “sin” originally referred to “missing a target,” cf. Judges 20:16. In Scripture, it means disobeying God. Sin is wrong, I John 5:17. It is rebellion against the authority of heaven. It is forsaking the instructions of the Lord, Isaiah 58:2. Sin is lawlessness (or acting like there is no law), I John 3:4. It comes from an immoral disposition, Genesis 6:5. It blossoms into wicked deeds, Jeremiah 21:14a.

1. Cause Of Sin. Why do humans sin? Scholars raise the question. They offer various possibilities. The Bible has the answer.

(a) Physical Body. Some folks believe sin is the inability of the spirit to control the body.

They argue that this lack of control is a relic of our animal past. Thus, according to them, our fleshly instincts are stronger than our spiritual inhibitions. This makes the body the prison of the spirit. It suggests that the spirit has to escape the body in order to be pure. However, Satan, the prince of evil, does not have a body. Yet he is sinful. Our body is not the problem. It is not irreversibly given to the indulgence of natural impulses, Romans 6:12,13. The determining factor, in our struggle with sin, is letting the Spirit rule in our life, Romans 8:5,6.

(b) Human Weakness. Man is supposedly incomplete. According to the “human weakness” view, sin is the path to wholeness. It is a platform for growth. In other words, sin is a step toward spiritual adulthood. Some have called this the “green apple theory.” It sees man as an unripe fruit. It contends that sin is a necessary stage in human development. For how can one learn to walk without falling? And, similarly, how can one know spiritual maturity without experiencing spiritual immaturity? But this is nonsense. Sin brings destruction. It is never an improvement. It makes man a “rotten apple.” Sin is not good. It is not necessary for spiritual growth. If one cannot know good until he knows evil, how does God know good? Sin is not holiness-in-the-making. Hence, believers are not commanded to welcome sin but to “hate” sin, Romans 12:9; cf. Psalm 97:10; Amos 5:15.

(c) Personal Selfishness. The Bible says man is a selfish creature. Sin is the gratification of personal desires. Self is at the center of all wickedness, I John 2:16. Sinners are “lovers of themselves,” II Timothy 3:2a. The ungodly are self-willed. They are self-righteous. God has broken the tyranny of self-centeredness. His children are freed from living unto “themselves,” II Corinthians 5:15. They have died to self. Christ now lives in them, Galatians 2:20. Clearly the inspired word indicates that the tap root of sin is self.

2. Pervasiveness Of Sin. Wickedness is everywhere. Crime is rampant. The world is drowning in sin, Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Psalm 14:2,3.

(a) Everyone Is Frail. Though made a little lower than the angels, man is weak. He is as frail as a desert flower, Psalm 103:15,16; cf. Psalm 78:39. At best, man is merely “dust and ashes,” Genesis 18:27. He does wrong “without trying.” The world is a cesspool of sin. Christians once lived among the disobedient. But, by the grace of God, they have escaped the pollution of this world, Ephesians 2:1-9.

(b) Everyone Has Sinned. All humans are sinners, I Kings 8:46; Psalm 143:2; Proverbs 20:9; Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:10-12; Galatians 3:22; James 3:2a; I John 1:8. And, in our better moments, we recognize our sinfulness. Seneca, a first century Roman writer, said, “We are all wicked.” Robert Burns, an eighteenth century Scottish poet, wrote, “The best of men are merely those who make the fewest blunders.” Every believer is aware of his propensity to sin, Psalm 51:4; I Timothy 1:15. The greatest sin, then, is to think one is sinless, I John 1:10.

3. Origin Of Sin. The fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is a historical fact. It really happened, Genesis 3:1-7. Jesus referred to it as an authentic event, John 8:44. The apostle Paul did, too, II Corinthians 11:3; I Timothy 2:14. If one denies the original event, he must reject the subsequent references to it. But, if later inspired writers accept the event as truth, the original event must be true.

(a) Facts Of The Fall. Satan tempted Adam and Eve. What he did is what he continues to do. He has no new tricks up his sleeve. Thus, it behooves us to take a closer look at his devious schemes.

(1) The Lord Was Suspected. The devil began by questioning the command of God. *“Did He really say, ‘You must not eat...?’”* Genesis 3:1. In other words, did God really mean what He said? Satan was emphasizing the restrictive prohibition instead of the generous permission of God, Genesis 2:16,17. In effect, this dishonest rascal was casting suspicion on the goodness of the Lord.

(2) His Authority Was Denied. The subtle seduction continued. Satan contradicted God, Genesis 3:4. Humans allow the devil to disagree with heaven because they dislike divine commands. They object to the authority of God. They want to do what they want to do. This rebellious attitude leads them to think that God is unfair. He has no right to withhold information, to remain in control. Humans believed they can decide things for themselves. Satan played on these feelings. He duped man into disobeying, Genesis 3:6.

(3) Human Desire Was Championed. Adam and Eve wanted food. They pursued what pleased them. They sought to “be like God,” Genesis 3:5. The path to sin was paved by the desire of the flesh. It enticed man to focus on his obsessions, James 1:14,15. The whole river is polluted once the spring is poisoned, Proverbs 4:23.

(b) Objections To The Fall. Many people refuse to believe the biblical narrative. They treat the temptation of man as a myth. They view the punishment of man as an injustice.

(1) Questioning The Temptation. Would a good God allow Satan to tempt man to do a bad thing? Would a powerful God let it happen? Absolutely! Job 1:6-12; I Peter 5:8. These are interesting questions. But they focus on the wrong issue. Since the Lord allowed man to be a free moral agent, he was destined to sin sooner or later? Under the best of circumstances, the devil sinned. The real issue is the mercy of God. He rescued humans from their self-inflicted predicament. The Lord saw what was coming. He stood by. He waited. When man fell, God stepped in and offered to lift him up.

(2) Rejecting The Punishment. Can such a great penalty result from such a slight disobedience? Yes! The greatest test of obedience is found in little commandments. For he who is faithful in small things will likely be faithful in big ones, Luke 16:10. Trifles are trifles only

to triflers. Man needs to be aware of the significance of the insignificant, Matthew 25:21. Sin is sin. Disobedience is disobedience. Regardless of the size—whether big or small, whether large or little—sin offends the Lord, Matthew 24:45-51.

(c) Results Of The Fall. Man was tested. He failed. The Lord issued the consequences, Genesis 3:3. Man must “die.” Because he disobeyed, man was not allowed to eat from the tree of life. Adam and Eve were not allowed to live forever, Genesis 3:22.

(1) Death. Humans die in two ways. There is a physical death—a separation of the spirit from the body. There is also a spiritual death—a separation of the soul from God, Isaiah 59:2. Adam and Eve suffered spiritual death first. They were banished from the presence of God, cf. Genesis 4:14. Years later, like all flesh, Adam “died,” Genesis 5:5. While seeking to become like God, he ended up becoming unlike God. While seeking to become independent of God, he became utterly dependent on Him.

(2) Exclusion. Selfishness ruined everything. The close companionship in the garden was lost. As time passed, the distance between creature and Creator widened. The gulf between them deepened, Genesis 6:6. For the most part, God was forgotten. Men were so filled with themselves there was no room for the Lord. So, in the course of time, worship was introduced, Genesis 4:3,4. It was supposed to remind the worshipper of his dependence on heaven. In retrospect, it had limited success. We are slow to learn. We are comfortable with the absence of God. We do not know what we are missing.

4. Effect Of Sin. A major theme in the Bible is the effect of sin. It raises some intriguing questions. Is the guilt of Adam and Eve passed on the whole human race? Or are only the consequences of their disobedience passed on? For some, this is a big issue. To others, it does not matter. Therefore, a brief discussion will suffice.

(a) Guilt Of Sin. A few folks say that the first parents became totally defiled. Hence, it is argued, their defilement was passed to all their posterity. However, the prophet Ezekiel disagreed, Ezekiel 18:20. Jesus did, too, Luke 8:15. A person cannot be totally inclined toward evil and be described as “noble and good.” Neither could they “hear and retain” the word. For, if total hereditary depravity was true, how could man “go from bad to worse,” II Timothy 3:13. Would he not already be totally bad?

(2) Consequences Of Sin. Personal guilt cannot be transferred from one individual to another, II Corinthians 5:10. However, the consequences of sin can be transmitted to others, Deuteronomy 5:9,10. The sin of Adam severed humanity from the “tree of life.” So, “in Adam, all die,” I Corinthians 15:22. It is illogical to advocate that, because all died physically in Adam, all must have died spiritually in Adam. His disobedience could not make us sinners without our choosing to sin. Neither could Christ make us righteous without our choosing to “obey Him,” Hebrews 5:8,9. It is true that people are occasionally described as born in sin, Psalms 51:5.

This verse is not ascribing sin to the newborn anymore than a child is angry because he is spanked in anger. A child is born in sin when a man and woman make a bad choice, conceive, and give birth. This is not the fault of the child. The little one is not a sinner. Otherwise, Jesus issued a flawed illustration, Matthew 18:1-4.

CHAPTER SIX

CHRIST

Is Jesus a real person? Did He live and die in Palestine as the Bible maintains? Numerous skeptics say, “No!” Their denial flies in the face of many qualified historians. Christ is mentioned by reputable first century secular scholars. Their testimony is clear. To deny His existence, one must ignore the witness of those who lived closest to the events in question.

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Jesus Christ cannot be overlooked. He demands an explanation. Could unaided human wisdom have invented such a person? Without apology, the Bible presents the Lord as a real individual. He is portrayed as the Messiah in literature, art, and history. For over two thousand years, His influence has been unparalleled in the lives of men and women around the world. This is not accidental. A greater miracle—than any accredited to Jesus—would be required to concoct such a person. If the authors of Scripture fabricated their stories, they created the grandest hoax of all time. The consequence of this indictment is staggering. It accuses the first century historians of perjury. It charges the biblical writers with fraud. It says the martyrdom of millions was unnecessary. It blames Christians with gross dishonesty. It makes the Bible a falsehood. It leaves multitudes of believers without a foundation for their faith and work.

II. PERSON OF CHRIST

The word “person” is used to indicate the nature of Jesus’ earthly existence. Two qualities of this unique person will be examined: his humanity and his deity.

A. Humanity

The central theme in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke is the story of a man. His name is Jesus. He was from the town of Nazareth. He was the long awaited Messiah, Luke 2:10,11. Jesus was proclaimed the Lord, II Corinthians 4:5. He was the incarnate God dwelling among men, John 1:14.

1. Reality Of His Humanity. Christ was human. His humanity was real. He was not a mirage. He was like us. He called Himself a man, John 8:40; cf. Romans 5:15; I Corinthians 15:21; I Timothy 2:5. The term “flesh,” which indicates “human nature,” was applied to Jesus, I John 4:2. He had a physical body, I Timothy 3:16. He possessed the

instinctive attributes of a human being, Matthew 4:2; 8:24; Mark 3:5; John 4:6; 11:35; 19:28. Jesus was truly human, Hebrews 2:14.

2. Perfection Of His Humanity. Jesus lived an ideal life. He attended worship regularly, Luke 4:16. He challenged others to convict Him of sin, John 8:46. Christ was perfect. He “*had no sin,*” II Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 7:26; 9:14; I Peter 1:18,19; I John 3:5. He possessed more than a passive innocence. He was “*tempted in every way*” yet remained sinless, Hebrews 4:15. He obeyed God. Nothing was forced. He did the will of the Father without a struggle, John 5:30. Holy living was second nature to Him. He never forgot. He simply knew. Jesus was a perfect human being.

B. Deity

The deity of Christ includes an origin, Matthew 1:18-23, knowledge, John 2:24,25, and power, John 20:30,31, that belong to God alone. Jesus is God, Titus 2:13.

1. Divine Origin. Christ was God in the flesh. His birth was a miracle. Ordinary conception involves the originating of a new person. Jesus already existed, John 1:1,2. The conception of Christ could not have been an ordinary conception. Jesus was not created from the life stock of the human race. He was a preexistent divine being implanted in the womb of Mary. It was a virgin conception. Joseph, her husband, was not involved, Matthew 1:24,25. The virgin birth heralds the arrival of an extraordinary man.

(a) Historical Reality. The authors of the Gospels realized the importance of this event, Luke 1:1-4. They were honest men. How could they have invented such a story? It is contrary to common logic. It never happened before or since. To make up such a tale, belies all human decency. It risked putting a cloud of illegitimacy over Jesus, cf. John 8:41. The apostles were not that kind of men. The early Church was not that kind of people. When the virgin conception was first mentioned, there were eye-witnesses still living who could testify to the error of such a story. No one raised a dissenting voice. The virgin birth is a historical fact.

(b) Textual Truth. The Gospel records are trustworthy. Their genuineness is beyond question. They clearly describe the supernatural origin of Christ. Joseph was the legal father of Jesus since he was the “*husband*” of Mary, Matthew 1:16. But, to emphasis the fleshly connection of Christ with humanity, He was “*born*” of Mary. Thus, in fact, it was correct to say, Joseph was not the literal father but merely the “*supposed*” father of Jesus, Luke 3:23. All of this is an unnecessary wording if Joseph was the biological parent of Christ. Again, the testimony of Scripture is strong. The virgin birth is true.

2. Divine Knowledge. Jesus indicated that He was from heaven, John 3:13. A beginning did not apply to Him, John 8:58; 17:5,24. He was God. It is not surprising, then, that He had superhuman knowledge, Matthew 26:34; Luke 5:4-8; John 1:47-50; 2:23,24.

3. Divine Power. Christ worked miracles. He could do what God alone was capable of doing, Matthew 9:6; Mark 4:39. This phenomenal power showed that Jesus was, at the same time, truly man and truly God.

C. Union Of Two Natures

Jesus possessed both a human and a divine nature. He was one, undivided person in whom two natures were inseparably united. These natures were unaltered. The Lord was truly unique, one-of-a-kind, cf. John 1:18; I John 4:9. Thus, Christ was not God and man nor God in man but actually God-man.

1. Proof Of The Union. Jesus spoke of Himself (and others spoke of Him) as one person. There was no change of pronouns between the human and divine natures, John 17:22,23. It is a mistake to say Jesus spoke from His human side on some occasions, Mark 13:32, and from His divine side on other occasions, John 3:13. There was no such separation between His two natures. All His words were spoken by the God-man. All His works were done by the same God-man. Hence, His mediation is equally ascribed to His human nature, I Timothy 2:5,6, as well as His divine nature, Hebrews 1:2,3. We speak a mystery: a human and a divine disposition organically and indissolubly wrapped in the flesh of one individual.

2. Misunderstanding Of The Union. The nature of Christ as God-man is a puzzling phenomenon. People have not always explained it in the same way. Two of these explanations are mentioned here. Both are interesting. Neither is acceptable.

(a) Dormant Deity. Some folks believe Christ gave up His deity to become man. They assume He was devoid of his divinity during His sojourn on earth. In other words, His deity was dormant. It was present but paralyzed, Philippians 2:5-7. If that is true, how does one account for His divine knowledge and power? How is His oneness with the Father explained? John 17:22. This view destroys the uniqueness of His mediation, Hebrews 4:14-16. It makes it impossible for God to experience humanity. For, if His deity was dormant, the divine Christ could not sympathize with our struggles since He was merely a human on earth!

(b) Developed Deity. Others believe the union between the divine and human elements of Christ developed gradually. They claim that this growth was completed in the resurrection. The Bible is silent. There is no hint of such a scenario in Scripture. This position makes Jesus a man of God but not a man who was God. If these two natures were not fully developed until the resurrection, the death of Jesus was not the death of God. Thus, the crucifixion lacked a divine quality. Finite suffering cannot have infinite value. Therefore, the cross cannot redeem. If Christ was not God, He was not the Savior of man.

3. Mystery Of The Union. The union of the human and the divine in Jesus is a perplexing dilemma. It is beyond full comprehension. There is no parallel like it in human experience. He

is two persons in one person. That is the uniqueness of the God-man. Jesus was as completely God as if He was not man. And He was as completely man as if He was not God.

(a) Possibility Of The Union. Because humans were created in the image of God, Genesis 1:27, and because humans can “*participate in the divine nature*,” II Peter 1:4, it is possible for deity and humanity to dwell in one person. God cannot unite with an animal, tree, or rock and maintain His true nature. Neither can a circle be joined to a square and keep its real essence.

(b) Probability Of The Union. The possession of two natures does not require a double personality. A human father and a human mother each contribute something to the nature of their offspring. The result is not two persons in one child. The Fatherhood of God and the motherhood of Mary produced one individual (with two natures).

(c) Reality Of The Union. Due to the Spirit in Christ, His humanity had the power to be, to do, and to know as God. As a servant, the God-man was “*anointed with the Holy Spirit*,” Acts 10:37,38; Hebrews 9:14. The third person of the trinity empowered Jesus’ humanity like the Spirit influences human believers. He affected Christ as flames make iron turn red. His humanity did not become deity anymore than hot iron becomes fire.

(d) Necessity Of The Union. The union of the divine and human natures of Christ was necessary. Otherwise, how could Jesus be an effective go-between with God and man. His twofold nature gave Him a connection with heaven and earth. He could put His hand on both the shoulder of God and the shoulder of man. He alone possessed an equal dignity with God and a perfect sympathy with man, Hebrews 2:17,18; 4:15,16; 7:25.

III. STATES OF CHRIST

The term “states” is used to indicate the conditions of Jesus’ life. The particular elements that combine to make up His state of being are His humiliation and His exaltation.

A. Humiliation

The humiliation of Christ refers to His making Himself nothing, “*taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness*,” Philippians 2:7.

1. Nature Of Humiliation. Christ left heaven. He became poor so that we might become rich, II Corinthians 8:9. He abandoned His throne in order to carry a cross, Matthew 20:28. He took on flesh so that we might see God, John 1:14.

(a) Surrender Of His Deity. Some folks believe Jesus surrendered His divine nature so that He could take on a human nature. However, that creates a problem. For, while on earth,

the Lord exercised His divine knowledge and power. He was still conscious of His divinity when He lived in the flesh, John 17:5. Can God stop being God? The argument “throws the baby out with the bath.” It emphasizes His humanity and disregards His deity.

(b) Surrender Of The Exercise Of His Deity. This position, that seems to best explain the incarnation, says that Christ laid aside His crown. He let loose of His equality with God, Philippians 2:6. He divested Himself of His divine form. He became flesh. He was “born” like the rest of us, Galatians 4:4. He resigned not the possession of His deity but the exercise of His deity, Colossians 2:9. We give up our human powers in sleep. But, while sleeping, we do not cease to be humans. The humiliation of Christ was submission to the authority of God, John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 8:29. It consisted of His subjection to temptation, suffering, and death, Philippians 2:8. He became a sacrifice for sin, Romans 8:3a; II Corinthians 5:21. The God-man voluntarily submitted Himself to the shame of crucifixion, Hebrews 12:2. The Lord died on Calvary so that we might live in heaven.

2. Stages Of Humiliation. The self-renunciation of the Lord was an “emptying.” He laid aside the exercise of His divine nature. However, while on earth, the trinity remained intact. It was unimpaired in every way. The universe still needed to be “held together,” Colossians 1:17; cf. Hebrews 1:3. Christ was omnipresent. He was present everywhere as if each place was the only place that received His fullness. He did not withdraw from one area in order to be present in another place.

(a) Submission To Limitation. The humiliation of Christ included the limitations of human growth and development. Jesus did not articulate His unique connection with God until He was twelve, Luke 2:49. He did not work His first miracle until He was thirty, John 2:11. This is not a change in nature but the utilization of the nature He already had.

(b) Subjection To Suffering. Christ “humbled Himself.” He became like a “sinful man.” He was “obedient to death.” Though the God-man was innocent, He allowed Himself to be abused by sinful men so that He could redeem them, I Peter 2:24. They misunderstood who He was. His words “*forgive them for they do not know what they are doing*” have enormous significance, Luke 23:34. His tormentors treated Him as a criminal instead of as the Christ.

B. Exaltation

The word “exaltation” refers to the lifting up of Jesus after His humiliation. It points to the elevation of His status. It suggests the renewal of His pre-incarnation state. It includes His resurrection, ascension, and coronation.

1. Nature Of His Exaltation. The exaltation of Christ followed the completion of His suffering. He was “*crowned with glory and honor*,” Hebrews 2:9. He resumed the exercise of His deity. This signaled the removal of the encumbering limitations He imposed on Himself

during His journey here below.

2. Stages Of His Exaltation. His exaltation was the joy that was set before Him when He endured the cross, Hebrews 12:2; cf. Isaiah 53:10-12. The Lord saw the end. He pressed on. He completed His assignment. He reaped the rewards of “a job well done,” cf. Matthew 17:5.

(a) Resurrection. Jesus volunteered to die. And, when He died, it was necessary for Him to be raised, Acts 2:26,27,31; cf. John 10:17,18. The resurrection exalted Christ in several ways. It revealed His power over death, Romans 6:9. It confirmed His claim as the divine Son, Romans 1:4. It attested to the acceptance of His work, Acts 2:22. His resurrection inaugurated His ministry of redemption, Romans 4:25.

(b) Ascension. Jesus went back to heaven. His ascension was the fulfillment of prophecy, Daniel 7:13,14. He had more work to do, John 14:1-3. He went back to heaven to fulfill His priestly duties, Hebrews 8:4-6. If Christ had not gone, the Spirit would not have come, John 16:7. His exaltation in the ascension was as necessary for salvation as His crucifixion.

(c) Coronation. The final stage in the exaltation of Christ was His “*sitting down at the right hand of God*,” Romans 8:34; Hebrews 10:12; I Peter 3:22. The “right hand” is an expression of co-regency. Christ now reigns with the Father. It was the custom of ancient Middle Eastern kings to place their oldest son on a throne by their right side as a co-ruler. The Son of God shares the prerogatives of royalty with the Father. Jesus was not co-regent until after His resurrection, Matthew 28:18. The arrangement will cease when the kingdom has been fully established, I Corinthians 15:24,28. The coronation is a verification of Jesus’ claim to a pre-incarnation glory with the Father, John 17:4,5. For now, His power, as the Messianic king, is universal, Ephesians 1:20-22.

IV. OFFICES OF CHRIST

The “offices” of Christ are the functions assigned to (or assumed by) Him. These functions are that of prophet, priest, and king. He fills all three positions simultaneously. Like the heart, lungs, and brain, they are not separate, isolated actions.

A. Prophet

A prophet is an inspired spokesperson for God. As the mouthpiece of heaven, the prophet makes the will of God known. He is the means of communication between God and man, cf. Exodus 4:14-16 and 7:1. Jesus was a prophet, John 6:14. He not only spoke the word, He was the Word, John 1:1. His prophetic office was perpetuated through the Holy Spirit, John 16:12-14. This essential function was passed on to the apostles. And, from the apostles, it was handed to the Church, Ephesians 3:10. Now, by virtue of our union with Christ and our connection with the Spirit, we are the voice of God, I Peter 2:9.

B. Priest

A priest was appointed by God on behalf of men. He offered sacrifices and interceded for worshippers. In both respects, Christ is a priest, Hebrews 7:24-28.

1. Sacrificial Work. The important function of the priesthood was to assure the holiness of those coming to God, Exodus 28:38; Leviticus 10:17; Numbers 18:1. The priest was a mediator between man and God, Malachi 2:7. Hence, it is through the priesthood that a purified people can approach Jehovah. Jesus is our priest—united with the Father and united with us, Hebrews 2:14-17. Through one sacrifice, He made atonement for our sins, Hebrews 10:11-14.

(a) Definition Of Atonement. The word “atone” signifies “to be at one” with someone. It indicates a harmonious personal relationship. Therefore, “atonement” suggests “reconciliation.” It refers to the process by which hindrances to harmony are removed. “To atone for” a wrong is to take action which cancels the ill effects of a mistake. The atonement is related to the holiness of God and the humanity of Christ.

(1) Holiness Of God. Sin must be punished, Psalms 5:4,5. All humans are sinners. Therefore, judgment is inevitable, Romans 2:6. The atonement is the way heaven satisfies the demands of law. It fulfills the requirements of justice. God cannot do otherwise, Deuteronomy 32:4. Jehovah gave His Son to die for human guilt, Romans 5:6-8. His death was an unearned and undeserved gift to mankind, Romans 3:23-25a. The sacrifice of Jesus on behalf of others was a demonstration of the righteousness of God in allowing sinners to be saved, Romans 3:25b,26; 8:1-4.

(2) Humiliation Of Christ. The atonement required the humiliation of Christ, Hebrews 2:11,14,15. His humiliation ultimately led to the cross, Isaiah 53:4,12. In order to rescue a drowning person, one must get into the water. The rescuer must assume the condition of the perishing. So it was with Christ. He took on our situation. The displeasure of God against us was placed on Him, Galatians 3:13. This was not a last minute idea. God planned our redemption “*before the creation of the world,*” Matthew 25:31-34; Ephesians 1:4.

(b) Description Of Atonement. The Scripture represents the atonement in several different ways. Redemption is described as a moral, commercial, legal, and sacrificial provision.

(1) Moral. The atonement originated in the love of God, John 3:16; Romans 5:8; I John 4:9. It was an unselfish act which invites human imitation, Luke 9:22-24; II Corinthians 5:15; Ephesians 5:1,2; I Peter 2:20,21. The sacrifice of Christ on behalf of sinful men is a moral example for us to follow.

(2) Commercial. The atonement is also a ransom paid to free humankind from the slavery of sin, Matthew 20:28; I Timothy 2:5,6. The word “redemption” means to repurchase or to deliver by the payment of a price, I Corinthians 6:20; 7:23; Revelation 5:9. The death of Christ is the price, the bargain, or the exchange for the deliverance of men from their sins.

(3) Legal. The atonement is an act of obedience to the will of God, Matthew 26:39; Romans 5:19; Philippians 2:8. Jehovah condemned sin. Jesus took upon Himself that condemnation. He suffered the penalty that belonged to sinners, Romans 4:25; Hebrews 9:28. Once the penalty was paid, God could be fair in saving those who believe, Romans 3:25b,26. The demands of the law that convicted transgressors were satisfied by the death of Christ.

(4) Sacrificial. The atonement reconciles man to God, Romans 5:10; II Corinthians 5:18,19; Colossians 1:20. The term “reconciliation” suggests removing the hostility between individuals who are at odds with one another. In the Bible, the removal of enmity is accomplished by offering a sacrifice, Leviticus 17:11. Jesus is “*the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world*,” I John 2:2; cf. I Peter 3:18. His death removes the animosity of God toward us. Christ did for us what we could not do for ourselves. Through undeserved grace, His death satisfied the demands of justice and removed the obstacles to pardon, for everyone who believes in Jesus.

(c) Dimensions Of Atonement. The Bible says the sacrifice of Christ was made for everyone. It brought salvation to all who believe, Romans 3:22; I Timothy 2:5,6; Titus 2:11; I John 2:2. Unfortunately, though the ransom was paid, only a few will choose to accept it, Matthew 7:13,14.

(1) Secured A Stay Of Execution. The human race would have been cut off in the Garden of Eden if God had immediately executed the first sinner, II Peter 3:15a. For a while, the Lord exercised “*forbearance*,” Romans 3:25. He “*overlooked such ignorance*,” Acts 17:30,31. He was justified in doing so because He knew Calvary was part of His plan. Those who lived before Christ received mercy (though they were not fully aware of the arrangements of their salvation), Matthew 8:11; Hebrews 11:39,40.

(2) Removed Obstacles To Human Pardon. Now the only barrier to human redemption is willful opposition to God, Luke 13:34. The Good News is NOT “God will forgive if you will repent.” Rather, the Gospel IS “God has shown mercy; therefore, believe and accept His grace,” John 3:16,17. Heaven has sent the invitation. Will we respond? Matthew 22:1-7. God is at the door. He is waiting for us to invite Him in, Revelation 3:20. All obstacles have been removed. The ball is in our court!

(3) Offered Incentives To Respond. Humans are moved to love God because God loves them. He loved them when they were still sinners, Romans 5:6-8. He made the first move, I John 4:19. He broke the ice. No threats. No angry words. No scolding. God was

concerned. He sent His Son so that *“we might live,”* I John 4:9,10. He loved each person as if they were the only person for Him to love. He sacrificed Himself *“once for all,”* Hebrews 7:27. His death was for all sin, for all people, for all time. Sufficient incentives are present. Will an adequate response be made?

2. Intercessory Work. The priesthood of Christ did not end with His sacrificial atonement. It continues in His intercessory intervention. As a priest, in the presence of God, Jesus mediates for everyone who calls on His name, Hebrews 7:23-25. The Lord prayed for His followers before His ascension, John 17:9-11. Surely, if He interceded for them while on earth, He is interceding for them while in heaven, Hebrews 9:24.

(a) Nature Of His Intercessory Work. On the basis of His atoning death, Christ is defending us before the Father, I John 2:1. In short, He is our lawyer in heaven. He pleads our case. He is our advocate in the celestial throne room. If He is for us, who can be against us? Romans 8:33,34.

(b) Object Of His Intercessory Work. The intercessory work of Christ has a general and a special function. The general function secured the acceptance of His atoning death for all of us. The special function secures the acceptance of our *“spiritual sacrifices,”* I Peter 2:5. The Holy Spirit is a helper within man. He assists us in our prayers, Romans 8:26. Christ is our helper in heaven. He secures from the Father the answer to our petitions. The efforts of the second and third persons of the trinity complement each other. No one needs to worry. The saints have a divine advocate in the throne room of heaven and in the temple of their soul. The Son and the Spirit work tirelessly on our behalf. Why fret? Victory is assured.

C. King.

The office of king must be distinguished from His sovereignty before His incarnation. His present kingship is temporary. It will last from His ascension to His return. Then, at the end of time, He will hand the kingdom to God, I Corinthians 15:24. However, He now rules all things in heaven and on earth, Matthew 28:18. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He exercises a universal rule, Matthew 25:31,32; Hebrews 1:8,9; I Peter 3:22; Revelation 19:15,16. The saints should move forward in confidence. Their King reigns. His kingdom is an eternal kingdom, II Peter 1:10,11. That kingdom will be the inheritance of His faithful followers when He comes again to claim His own, Matthew 25:34.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SALVATION

Salvation is the ultimate concern of all religions. Every faith assumes that something is wrong. Each religion offers a remedy. Only Christianity says that God saves. The Bible is a record of His effort to rescue humankind. God is a God of salvation, Psalm 27:1. He sent Jesus to save. How appropriate! For “Savior” is the meaning of His name, Matthew 1:21.

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The need for salvation is based on three interlocking conditions. *First*, it implies a significant stress—a situation that humans are unable to fix. *Second*, salvation involves a deliverer—one who does for humanity what humanity cannot do for itself. And, *third*, it brings release from the circumstances that cause the stress. In other words, salvation is a movement—from crisis to calm, from danger to safety, from bad to good, from lost to found.

A. Failure Of Humans

History shows the depth of ignorance of man. It demonstrates the extent of moral bankruptcy in the human race. It reveals the spiritual depravity of humankind, Romans 1:18-25. Man crafted idols. The idols could not save. They were “worthless” chunks of wood and stone, Isaiah 44:9; Jeremiah 10:3-5. Only God can rescue, Proverbs 14:12; Jeremiah 10:23. The failure of humans prepared the way for the rescue of God.

B. Fullness Of Time

God made His move at the right time, Galatians 4:4; cf. Romans 5:6; Ephesians 1:10. The Mediterranean world spoke one language. There was a network of all-weather roads. A relative peace prevailed across the Roman Empire. People were searching for salvation. Favorable conditions were in place to send the Messiah.

II. PAST PREPARATIONS FOR REDEMPTION

God “predestined” the salvation of men, Ephesians 1:4,5,11; cf. Romans 8:29,30. He decreed the means of our deliverance before He created the world. And, regarding His plan of redemption, God has not changed His mind, Numbers 23:19; I Samuel 15:29; Malachi 3:6; James 1:17. Man must yield to His arrangements. The Lord will not force conformity to His will,

Genesis 6:5-7; I Samuel 15:10,11; Jeremiah 7:31; 18:7-10; 19:5; Jonah 3:10. He desires our cooperation. He wants our willing obedience. Free choice is the foundation of His election. It is the basis of His calling.

A. Election

Election was an act of God. It was His choice. His selection was an expression of His mercy. Human effort had no part in His election, Romans 9:16; cf. Deuteronomy 7:7-9.

1. Clarification Of The Doctrine. Many folks are troubled by the doctrine of election. They assume God predetermined who would be saved. But, if He did, He would have violated the free will of man. The election of God requires a voluntary response. There is no suggestion in Scripture that anyone is forced (or prevented) from believing against his will. Election simply shows that God has acted to provide salvation. Everyone is offered a free gift. However, in order to enjoy its benefits, the gift must be received.

(a) Salvation Of The Elect. God decided to save. He selected the means of salvation. He chose to rescue those who believe. The Lord invites believers by the Gospel. Those who respond, He promises a share in the glory of Jesus Christ, II Thessalonians 2:13,14. Some people reject His generous offer. In effect, they consider themselves unworthy of eternal life, Acts 13:46. Others accept His terms of salvation. They honor His word, Acts 13:48. Divine election requires human reception. Those who believe must make their "*calling and election*" sure (or certain), II Peter 1:10. In other words, if one is to be counted among the "*chosen*," he must "*clothe*" himself in holiness, Colossians 3:12,13.

(b) Foreknowledge Of God. "*The Lord knows those who are His*," II Timothy 2:19. He invites everyone, Matthew 22:1-10. He does not want anyone to perish, II Peter 3:9. Still some refuse, Matthew 23:37. They do so of their own accord. God knew that would happen. He wished it was otherwise. Yet He does not force the reluctant to obey. Man is free to accept or reject Him. And they do. Therefore, the reaction of God is merely an echo of the response of man, II Chronicles 15:2; Jeremiah 18:1-10. Like clay in the hand of the potter, we must yield. If we wish to be a noble vessel, we can be a noble vessel, II Timothy 2:20,21. It is our choice.

(c) Predetermined Choice Of The Elect. God decided how man would be saved before He created Adam and Eve, Ephesians 1:3,4. He eventually made His intentions known "*in Christ*," Ephesians 1:9,10; 3:2-6. For a long time, His plans were a mystery—hidden from the world. Now they are publicly proclaimed as Good News. In a spontaneous act of undeserved kindness, God "*prepared*" our redemption "*in advance*," Ephesians 2:8-10. He drew a circle. He declared that all who stepped into that circle would be saved. That circle was Jesus Christ. When we are baptized, we enter into a saving relationship with our Lord, Romans 6:3,4. In this way, God predetermined how men would be rescued. When they accept His Son, they become part of the company of the "*predestined*" ones.

(d) Recording Of Their Names. The Bible mentions the “*book of life*,” Revelation 20:15. It is a reference to the memory of God, Malachi 3:16; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3. The Lord remembers those who are His. Since, names can be erased out of His book, one obviously can forfeit his redemption, Exodus 32:33; Psalms 69:28. God retains the names of those who maintain their purity, Revelation 3:5. He removes the names of those who disregard His word. Until Christ returns, the book of life is subject to revision. God established the unchanging conditions of election. We are free to ignore or acknowledge His gracious arrangements. Our reaction determines whether He writes in or erases out our name.

2. Objection To The Doctrine. Many people are troubled by the idea of election. It seems illogical. But human logic is not the measure of divine election.

(a) Appears Unfair. Do we have the right to judge God? How dare we say He is unfair! Romans 9:14. He offers pardon to everyone. God is willing to save if man is willing to be saved, Proverbs 8:35,36.

(b) Encourages Immorality. If God has chosen the elect, why should the elect be concerned? Why not throw caution to the wind? Whoa! There is good reason to be careful. Believers remain vigilant because the devil remains on the prowl, I Peter 5:8,9. The saints must “*be on guard*,” Mark 13:33,34. The doctrine of election is not an incentive to be careless. It is the hope of the saint, the excuse of the sinner.

(c) Inspires Pride. Some who claim to be elect are proud of their election. However, salvation is not a reason to gloat, Ephesians 2:8,9. God deserves all the credit, Psalms 115:1. Election should lead to humility, James 4:6b,10.

(d) Discourages Evangelism. Why be evangelistic? If God has already decided, there is no reason to proclaim His salvation. Is that not a misunderstanding of election? Indeed, God decided. He decided “*how*” salvation can be found. He did not decide “*who*” would find it. That is a huge difference! People will ignore the message. But the messenger must still speak, Ezekiel 2:7. God will not alter His plan of salvation in order to accommodate the obstinate. Those who reject His word seal their own fate, Mark 16:16. Christians are charged to “*preach the word*,” II Timothy 4:2.

B. Calling

The call from heaven is an invitation of God. It is His encouragement to accept salvation provided in Jesus Christ. A call uttered by a superior being demands a response. Because God has called, we must answer.

1. General Invitation. The Lord calls everyone, Isaiah 45:22; Ezekiel 33:11; Matthew 11:28; Revelation 3:20. God is sincere in offering this invitation. He wants people to

respond favorably. He is not obligated to force them to do so. He draws people, John 12:32. He does not drag them. The Lord took a risk. He paid a terrible price for our redemption. He allows the sinner the freedom to decide, Revelation 22:17. He did all He could, cf. Isaiah 5:4. It is up to us to do our part, Philippians 2:12,13.

2. Special Invitation. Those who accept His invitation are described as “called,” Romans 8:30; I Corinthians 1:23,24. The called are urged to obey. They are encouraged to submit, I Thessalonians 2:11,12. The encouragement of God can be resisted, Isaiah 65:12. He tries to persuade with promises of mercy and pardon, Isaiah 55:6,7; II Thessalonians 2:14; II Peter 1:10,11. It is a “high” calling because it originates in heaven and draws men to heaven, Philippians 3:14; Hebrews 3:1. Christians, then, are asked to conduct their lives in a manner befitting this generous offer, Ephesians 4:1; II Thessalonians 1:11.

III. PRESENT COMPONENTS FOR SALVATION

In the past, God elected. Humans were called. Now, in the present, He regenerates. Believers convert. Each of these components describes redemption from a different vantage point. It is a mistake to view regeneration and conversion as a chronological sequence. They are merely the divine and human sides of the same event.

A. Regeneration

God aids man in his conversion. Heaven helps humans turn away from sin and turn toward the Lord. This assistance is labeled “regeneration.” The term means “rebirth.” It is the divine side of conversion. It is simply God turning man to heaven. The Scripture recognizes the activity of both God and man in salvation, John 15:5. God turns man to Himself, Psalms 85:4; Jeremiah 31:18; Lamentations 5:21. Man turns himself to God, Joel 2:12-14. The Lord is the author of a new heart and a new spirit, Psalms 51:10; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26. Man is commanded to make for himself a new heart and a new spirit, Ezekiel 18:31; II Corinthians 7:1. The efforts of men are aided by the power of God. Regeneration is the will of God helping the endeavor of man. When man is confronted with the Good News, his carnal nature prompts him to resist it. What he wants to do, he finds difficult to accomplish, Romans 7:18-20. He must obtain help from above. In regeneration, God lends a hand.

1. Description Of Regeneration. Regeneration is an indispensable change in the disposition of the sinner, Jeremiah 13:23; John 6:44,45. Those who are “*dead in sin*” must be made alive before they can “*walk in newness of life*,” Ephesians 2:1,2,4,5. The newness begins in regeneration—being “*born again*,” John 3:3. The Lord purifies the inner disposition, Psalms 51:10; James 1:18; I Peter 1:23. It is an invisible work of God that results in a visible change in man, John 1:12,13; I John 5:18. Humans cannot give birth to themselves. They must be born of God, I John 3:9.

2. Necessity Of Regeneration. Everyone needs a change in moral character. We are commanded to live like God, 1 Peter 1:15,16. If we fail in living a holy life, there will be no mercy on the Judgment Day, Hebrews 10:26,27. The heart of all improvement is the improvement of the heart. God is essential to that renovation, Romans 8:5-8. It is impossible to experience a genuine conversion by human activity alone. A radical internal change is imperative. Conversion requires regeneration, John 3:7. The good intentions of man are as fruitless as trying to gather a harvest from an unplanted field, John 15:4.

3. Cause Of Regeneration. Some think regeneration is solely the work of man. They see it as self-help. Can man separate his moral intentions from his immoral tendencies? Can our shadow separate itself from us? The need for divine assistance is plain. The Lord must help us because we cannot help ourselves. He does not wait for us to get our act together. He nudges us at the starting gate. He guides us along the trail. He encourages us on the home stretch, Philippians 2:12,13. *"No one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws him,"* John 6:44. The Lord opens the heart of willing sinners, Acts 16:14. An internal change must happen before conversion can occur. *"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come for the Spirit of God,"* 1 Corinthians 2:14. Why? Sinners have hard hearts, Ephesians 4:18. They cannot understand the truth. They need the help of heaven.

B. Conversion

Conversion is a *"turning,"* Acts 3:26; 11:21. The convert turns away from sin and turns to God, Romans 6:11. As a turning empowered by regeneration, conversion includes faith, repentance, confession, and baptism.

1. Faith. In the matter of salvation, faith involves trust. It is *"being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see,"* Hebrews 11:1. Unless a person trusts God, it is impossible to please Him. Faith is indispensable to redemption, John 3:36.

(a) Elements Of Faith. A saving faith requires a change of mind, a change of feeling, and a change of purpose. Each of these elements depends on the other two.

(1) Intellectual Element. The saint believes that God exists, Hebrews 11:6. A demon does, too, James 2:19. The difference between the disciple and the demon is submission. Disciples *"earnestly seek"* God. The demons cringe. Their faith is stuck. They know God exists but they do nothing about it.

(2) Emotional Element. Faith feels the need for redemption. A broken spirit grasps for grace. Yet an emotional reaction, without a decisive conviction, results in no more than a temporary acceptance of salvation. It believes His promises. It sings His praises. Albeit, His rescue is soon forgotten, Psalms 106:10-13. Indeed, His word was never really practiced, Ezekiel 33:31,32. It never took root, Matthew 13:20,21; John 5:35. An emotional faith must be

coupled with a deep commitment in order to develop a lasting trust.

(3) Volitional Element. A trusting faith is demonstrated in surrender, Matthew 11:28,29. Faith accomplishes nothing unless it acts, James 2:14-17. A sick person may trust his doctor. Yet, unless the patient takes the medicine, his faith will not save him. Therefore, redemptive trust follows the instructions of the Great Physician, I John 3:24a. Faith requires action. The believer must put on his work clothes, Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:13,14. Like a three legged stool, faith must incorporate the intellect, emotions, and will of a person in order to be useful.

(b) Dimensions Of Faith. A faith that saves has several different aspects. Each of these properties contributes to a fuller understanding of belief.

(1) Foundation Of Faith. The bedrock of faith is the promise of God, Romans 4:20,21. The value of trust depends on who is trusted. Without the integrity of God, faith is merely a human wish. Redemptive faith rests on the truthfulness of the Lord, Hebrews 6:13-18.

(2) Object Of Faith. The object of faith is the person and work of Jesus, Colossians 1:24-27. Faith is a sinner committing himself to the Savior. Submission to and obedience of Christ are the book ends of a faith that redeems, James 2:26.

(3) Assurance Of Faith. The Holy Spirit confirms the faith of believers, Romans 8:16; I John 4:13. We are rescued by faith in Christ (rather than faith in our faith). Religious doubt stems from misplaced trust. Faith in Jesus liberates. Faith in our religion frustrates.

(4) Product Of Faith. When appropriately understood, faith leads to action. It is motivated by the indwelling of Christ, Galatians 2:20. Obedience comes from faith, Romans 1:5. It expresses itself *“through love,”* Galatians 5:6. Does not the Scripture say, *“Faith without works is useless?”* James 2:20-22. This is not work to earn salvation. It is obedience to show gratitude for the salvation that has already been received, Romans 4:4,5.

(5) Growth Of Faith. The follower of Christ should desire to grow in faith, Luke 17:5. It is sad when our spiritual progress stagnates. It is sadder when we become comfortable in our stagnation. We are most vulnerable when we feel least vulnerable, I Corinthians 10:12. Do we have sufficient confidence to ask for more faith? I John 5:14,15.

2. Repentance. Repentance is a voluntary change. The sinner sees the error of his way. He turns to God and away from sin, I Thessalonians 1:9b. This turning produces a change of behavior. The new behavior is called *“fruit in keeping with repentance,”* Luke 3:8a.

(a) Elements Of Repentance. Like faith, repentance includes a change of mind, a

change of feelings, and a change of purpose. And, likewise, as in the case of faith, each of these elements of repentance depends on the other two.

(1) Intellectual Element. Repentance begins with an awareness of sin. After the knowledge of sin, a feeling of guilt is most likely close behind, Psalm 51:3,4. But repentance is more than acknowledging error. Pharaoh said, “*I sinned,*” Exodus 9:27. Balaam, Achan, Saul, and Judas did, too, Numbers 22:34; Joshua 7:20; I Samuel 15:24; Matthew 27:4. Each of them was concerned about how their behavior affected them. None of them were concerned about how their actions affected God. Genuine repentance views sin through the eyes of the Lord, Job 42:5,6.

(2) Emotional Element. The second ingredient in repentance is the abhorrence of sin. The penitent feel remorse for their misdeeds, Psalm 51:1,2. Sorrow for sin is the doorway to repentance, II Corinthians 7:10. It begins with shame of self. And, when genuine, it goes on to become shame before God.

(3) Volitional Element. The final element in repentance is turning from sin. It seeks for pardon, Psalm 51:7-12. This implies knowledge of and hatred toward evil. Superficial change—a passing regret, a few tears, a wish to be different, a brief reform—is not repentance. God waits for man to pursue a full blown change of lifestyle. Anything less is “*contempt for the riches of His kindness,*” Romans 2:4. The Lord commands repentance, Acts 17:30. The choice is clear: repent or perish, Luke 13:3.

(b) Dimensions Of Repentance. Repentance has two different aspects. There is an inward and a negative side to turning.

(1) Inward Aspect. The inward phase of repentance must not be confused with the change of behavior that proceeds from it. Real repentance is shown by a confession of sin against God, Luke 18:13. It includes the act of making amends with those that have been mistreated, Luke 19:8; cf. Ezekiel 33:14,15. This redress is the after effects of repentance or the proof of repentance, Acts 26:20. The actual turning is an inward, invisible change in attitude toward doing wrong.

(2) Negative Aspect. The negative facet of repentance is its inability, on its own, to save. Certainly man is commanded to repent, Acts 2:37,38. Yet repentance does not remove guilt. The genuinely penitent person knows that his repentance has no saving merit. Without faith in Christ, repentance is merely sorrow over sin. Faith and repentance are like the oars of a row boat. If only one oar is used, the boat goes nowhere, Acts 20:21.

3. Confession. In confession, the mouth states what the heart feels, Romans 10:10. It is the voluntary acknowledgement of an inner conviction, I Timothy 6:12.

(a) Confession Of Faith. Confessions of faith are public admissions of belief in God, I Kings 8:33,34. They are unqualified confidence in Christ, I John 4:15. They proclaim absolute surrender to His service, Hebrews 4:14. Confession and faith must accompany one another, Romans 10:9. For faith without confession is really not faith after all, Matthew 10:32,33.

(b) Confession Of Sin. Acknowledgements of sin are made to God, Psalm 32:3-5, or to fellow believers, James 5:16. The Lord is faithful to forgive sins that are confessed, I John 1:9; cf. Proverbs 28:13. These confessions may admit to hidden faults or public failings, Psalm 19:12; Romans 7:18. But repentance must accompany confession. Otherwise it is an empty admission—a sham, a pretense, a fakery that disgusts both God and man.

4. Baptism. Baptism is an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins, Acts 2:38. It is necessary for salvation, Mark 16:16. It is required of everyone who is called by God, Acts 2:39, until Christ returns, Matthew 28:18-20.

(a) Action Of Baptism. The term “*baptize*” means to immerse, submerge, or bury. This would require an ample amount of water, John 3:23. It would also require going to the water, Acts 8:36-38. And, because baptism is a submerging in water, it involves “*coming up out of the water*,” Acts 8:39. Baptism is a burial, Colossians 2:12. Only an immersion in water can reflect the death, entombment, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Romans 6:3,4.

(b) Design Of Baptism. Baptism is a declaration of faith in the atoning death of the Savior, Romans 6:5. It is a proclamation of release from our earthly nature, Colossians 3:1-3. The believer is immersed in water, washed of his transgressions, and raised to walk in newness of life. Baptism is not optional, Mark 16:16. Like the ark during the flood of Noah, baptism saves the believer, I Peter 3:20b,21. Only those “*in Christ*” will be rescued, Romans 8:1; II Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:3. Baptism is the means of getting “*into Christ*,” Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:26,27. This makes baptism more than an outward religious ceremony. The Holy Spirit, operating in baptism, unites believers to Jesus. The new union is likened unto an adoption, Romans 8:12-17.

II. FUTURE CONTINUATION OF REDEMPTION

After election and calling, after regeneration and conversion, salvation requires sanctification and perseverance. Again, they are the divine and human sides of the same fact. Redemption is not complete until the saint is faithful unto the end, Matthew 24:12,13.

A. Sanctification

Sanctification is the continuing activity of God in man, I Thessalonians 5:23,24. The holy disposition imparted in regeneration is strengthened in sanctification. A crippled ship is towed to port where it is safe but not sound. A converted person is safe. Only a sanctified person is

(spiritually) sound. The believer needs the Lord to sanctify him as much as he needs the Lord to regenerate him. The Holy Spirit enables the Christian to more fully appropriate Christ, Romans 6:11-13. While sin still resides in the believer, it rules the unbeliever, Romans 8:5,6.

1. Elements Of Sanctification. Sanctification is an ongoing activity, Philippians 1:6; 3:15; Colossians 3:9,10. Man surrenders to God by installments. He may not mean to do so. He does nonetheless. Conversion, then, must constantly be updated. After turning to God, the Christian is in the process of *“being saved,”* Acts 2:47; I Corinthians 1:18; II Corinthians 2:15. Sanctification is distinguished from regeneration as growth is distinguished from birth, Ephesians 4:14,15; II Peter 3:18. Regeneration is the emergency treatment. Sanctification is the long term convalescence. Believers grow like trees. Growth in a tree occurs during a couple of months in the summer. The rest of the year the tree turns the new growth into hardened wood. So it is with the saint. He has short growth spurts. Each growth event is followed by days, months, or years solidifying the experience into spiritual maturity. Sanctification is the work of heaven that brings the believer into conformity to the word, John 17:17. It brings him into obedience to Christ, II Corinthians 10:5. Like newborn babies, we should *“crave pure spiritual milk,”* so that we may grow up in our salvation, I Peter 2:2. Man is not made holy through his own efforts. We are like the moon. The moon gives light because it reflects the sun. So we shine only when we reflect Christ, II Corinthians 3:18. The degree of sanctification attained is in direct proportion to the amount we allow Christ into our life, Romans 13:14. Faith can never be stationary. He who ceases to be better ceases to be good. Moreover, sanctification is never complete in this life. A good thing takes time. Complete sanctification is only achieved in the life to come, Philippians 3:20,21; Colossians 3:4; I John 3:2; Jude 24.

2. Misconceptions Of Sanctification. There are several misunderstandings concerning sanctification. Only two are mentioned here—release from obedience and freedom from sin.

(a) Release From Obedience. Jesus’ death on the cross freed us from the curse of the law, Galatians 3:13. Hence, some argue, the believer is free from the obligation to obey. If not, they claim, *“Christ died for nothing!”* Galatians 2:21. For, when we are led by the Spirit, we are not under law, Galatians 5:18. True! *“Christ is the end of the law”* as a method of salvation, Romans 10:4. But Jesus never abolished the obligation to obey, Matthew 5:17-19; Romans 6:15-17. Instead of being yoked to a law that condemns, we live by the Spirit that leads to righteousness, Galatians 5:24. The Christian walks in the light, I John 1:7. He is not under the law but under grace, Romans 6:14. We are free from sin but slaves of God, Romans 6:22. Obedience is very much a part of the Christian life, Hebrews 5:9.

(b) Freedom From Sin. Others will argue that a believer may—in this life—become perfectly free from sin. *“The law made nothing perfect,”* Hebrews 7:19. Yet, since we are free from the law, we can be *“perfect in Christ,”* Colossians 1:28. This claim distorts the truth. Man cannot be perfectly free from sin. *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the*

truth is not in us," I John 1:8. Perfection is not something man has the capacity to achieve, Psalm 119:96. When the hair of Samson was cut, the Philistines could control him. When the commands of God are trimmed, we think we can keep them. What a joke! *"There is no one who does not sin,"* I Kings 8:46; Ecclesiastes 7:20; James 3:2a. The genuine saint never claims sinless perfection. Rather he always presses on *"toward the goal to win the prize,"* Philippians 3:14. The truest holiness is that which is least confessed. The nearer man gets to perfection the less he talks about it. The true disciple always strives for perfection. He never believes that he has reached it, Philippians 3:15,16.

B. Perseverance

Perseverance is the voluntary continuance, by the believer, after conversion, in faith and obedience. It is what the godly do to maintain their salvation. Perseverance is not a natural result of conversion. It is the product of a constant vigilance. God sanctifies. The believer perseveres, I John 5:18; Jude 21.

1. Proof Of The Doctrine. There are two sources that confirm this teaching. First, the Scriptures abound in references to perseverance, Revelation 3:10. If believers maintain their resolve, God will keep them safe, Romans 8:31,32; II Thessalonians 3:3; I Peter 1:3-5. Second, the Bible is filled with warnings. The believer can fail. The devil is close at hand. Many have fallen from grace, I Corinthians 5:11. Hence, once saved does not necessarily mean always saved.

2. Objections To The Doctrine. There are folks who object to the doctrine of perseverance. In spite of the warnings, they believe that those who are elected, called, and regenerated by God are safe. They will not fall away. How, then, do they view the references about forsaking God? I Chronicles 28:9; Revelation 2:4,5. These folks believe true saints need not worry. The warnings do not apply to them. Is that right? This position demands a closer look.

(a) Saints Preserved Forever. Can a believer let his guard down since the Lord *"will not forsake His faithful ones?"* Psalm 37:28. Indeed, He will not abandon the faithful. But a saint can cease being a saint, Romans 11:22; Hebrews 3:12. God only preserves the faithful, Psalm 31:23. He only watches over those who love Him, Psalm 145:20. Believers must *"turn from evil and do good,"* Psalm 37:27; cf. I John 2:6. Beyond all doubt, there is a possibility of abandoning the faith, I Timothy 4:1, or denying the faith, I Timothy 5:8. It is a very real and immediate danger.

(b) His Love Is Never Removed. God promised He would not take His love from His servant, Psalm 89:33. Yet are there not conditions to that promise? Christians will be blessed if they remain in Christ, John 15:5,6, if they walk in the light, I John 1:6,7. However, some turn away *"to follow Satan,"* I Timothy 5:15. When they do, God gives them up. He allows them to wallow in their shameful ways, Romans 1:24-32.

(c) Believers Already Have Eternal Life. Others insist that a child of God has already *“passed from death to life,”* I John 3:14. This is true. The saint *“has the Son”* in the same sense in which he *“has the life,”* I John 5:12. Therefore, if the believer can be *“alienated”* from Christ, he can be *“alienated”* from life, Galatians 5:4. Once eternal life is secured, it must be persevered by *“doing good,”* Romans 2:5-10; I Timothy 6:17-19.

(d) No One Can Snatch A Saint Out Of The Hand Of God. After creation, the Lord did not abandon His world. He knew our vulnerability. He refused to leave us. The devil cannot sneak up and snatch away the sheep, John 10:27-29. However, though the Lord is a faithful Shepherd, the sheep can still go astray, Isaiah 53:6, forget God, Jeremiah 2:32, abandon the way of righteousness, and wander from the faith, I Timothy 6:10; II Timothy 2:18. The activity of God does not alter the possibility of man. Humans must still use the way of escape from temptation that God provides, I Corinthians 10:13. We must still *“resist the devil,”* James 4:7. We must *“turn from evil,”* I Peter 3:10-12. Otherwise, satan will draw us away from the truth.

(e) No Genuine Saint Is Ever Lost. Those who believe in the impossibility of apostasy claim that genuine Christians will never leave the faith. Only those who appear to be regenerated and converted will fall away, I John 2:19. What about those who were *“enlightened,”* who had *“tasted the heavenly gift,”* who *“shared in the Holy Spirit,”* who *“tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age?”* Were they not genuine saints? Yet they fell away, Hebrews 6:4-6; cf. Hebrews 10:26-29; II Peter 2:20,21. They were members of the family of God. But they turned aside unto wickedness. Is that not the lesson to be learned from the history of Israel? I Corinthians 10:1-12. A person may not sin as long as the word of God remains in His heart, Psalm 119:11; I John 3:9. However, the word can be removed, Luke 8:12. Though a believer is saved, he can still be lost, Ezekiel 18:21-27.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the power of God. He was active in the creation of the world, Genesis 1:2. He gave extraordinary physical strength to Samson, Judges 14:6. He also endowed David with gifts of leadership, I Samuel 16:13. The Spirit inspired the prophets, Isaiah 61:1. He anointed the Messiah, Acts 10:38. The Holy Spirit was given to the community of believers, Acts 5:32. He encourages everyone to come and drink of the “*water of life*,” Revelation 22:17. The Spirit is the presence of God. He gives strength, wisdom, and guidance. His activity is essential to the salvation of the saints. The believer has hope because God is near.

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Christians worship one God. They believe God exists eternally in three persons. The Trinity is a challenging concept. But, in spite of the mystery, it is an essential truth. A study of the Holy Spirit strengthens faith. While the focus of our trust is rightly on Christ, it is encouraging to see how the Spirit supports that belief. Indeed, He takes what belongs to Jesus and makes it known to those who follow Him, John 16:15.

A. Designations Assigned To The Holy Spirit

The primary meaning of the word “spirit” is wind or breath. It refers to the breath in humans, Genesis 2:7. The human breath is an invisible part of man. It represents his life or vitality, Job 17:1. By easy transition, it came to signify divine energy acting on nature, Isaiah 31:3a. There are a variety of designations applied to the Spirit. For instance, some designations express His relationship to the Father, Matthew 3:16; I Corinthians 6:11; II Corinthians 3:3. Other designations underscore His relationship with Christ, Acts 16:7; Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6; Philippians 1:19. Several designations articulate the benefits He bestows, John 14:17; Romans 8:2,15; Hebrews 10:29. A few designations emphasize His deity, II Corinthians 3:18; Hebrews 9:14. A couple of designations point to His purity, Matthew 1:18; I John 2:20. These designations combine to express a rich understanding of His nature. They demonstrate the sufficiency of the Holy Spirit to meet all our spiritual needs.

B. Difficulties In Studying The Holy Spirit

The biblical teaching about the Spirit is probably the most neglected doctrine of the Christian faith. The subject is clouded with confusion. It is puzzling to most people. How unfortunate! A diligent effort can remove a lot of the mystery. The Bible is not responsible for any ignorance

regarding the Spirit. Human ignorance is not the fault of God. Though we will not understand everything, we can get a handle on enough insights to bless our faith, to enrich our hope.

C. Diligence Required To Study The Holy Spirit

A sincere effort combined with a conscious reverence is needed. Those who do not understand should ask for wisdom, James 1:5. God will honor the genuine seeker. Enough can be learned to enjoy the blessings God intended. Knowledge of the Holy Spirit awaits those who earnestly try, Proverbs 2:3-6. The Lord wants us to learn, Psalm 51:6. *“He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning,”* Daniel 2:21; cf. Matthew 7:7. It is ours for the taking.

II. NATURE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Scriptures indicate that the Lord revealed Himself as three persons. The Old Testament speaks of them as God, the word of God, and the Spirit of God. The New Testament identifies the same three as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

A. Personality

The Spirit is not an “it.” He is not an impersonal, vague force released in response to human need. He is far more than the mind, emotion, or will of God. The Holy Spirit is a person. As a person, He is an indivisible, self-conscious, independent being. He has a mind, Romans 8:27, cf. I Corinthians 2:11, emotions, Romans 5:5, and a will, I Corinthians 12:11. He feels personal slights and injuries, Isaiah 63:10; Ephesians 4:30. The Spirit teaches, John 14:26, testifies, John 15:26, guides, John 16:12,13, forbids, Acts 16:6,7, searches, I Corinthians 2:10, and speaks, I Timothy 4:1. The Holy Spirit is obviously a person.

B. Deity

The Spirit is God, II Corinthians 3:18. He has the same nature and essence as the Father and the Son. He is a member of the sacred Trinity. All the characteristics of deity reside in Him: omnipresence, Psalm 139:7-10, omnipotence, Micah 3:8, and omniscience, I Corinthians 2:10,11. Like God, the Holy Spirit is eternal, Hebrews 9:14. Therefore, the Spirit is associated with the Father and the Son in creation, Genesis 1:2, and in miracles, I Corinthians 12:4-6. In other words, what They do, He does. His activity proves His likeness in nature to the Father and the Son.

C. Trinity

The Holy Spirit is God working in the world. He is the power of heaven facilitating the plan of God on earth. Where He is, God is. What He says, God says. They are the same—three

persons united as one, Genesis 6:3; Psalm 51:11; Ezekiel 36:27. There are no Old Testament passages which compel one to believe in the Trinity. But there are numerous verses which prepare one to anticipate the Trinity in the New Testament, Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8. The Spirit is clearly equal with the Father and the Son, Matthew 28:19; Romans 15:30; II Corinthians 13:14. It is important for believers to grasp this wonderful truth. False notions and wrong concepts about the Holy Spirit impoverish faith. They distort the grand scheme of redemption. It is urgent that we accurately understand and fully appreciate His work on our behalf.

III. WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The function of the Holy Spirit is as important as that of the Father and the Son. He has a parallel part in the eternal plan of heaven. Notwithstanding, the operations of the Spirit have been given less attention. Perhaps, this is because much of His effort is behind the scenes. Whatever the reason, it is imperative that we have a clear understanding of His work. Then we can cooperate more intelligently with His activity.

A. Creation

The Holy Spirit has been busy from the beginning in both the material and spiritual realms. His activity continues constant and effective. He was there when the universe came into existence. He is still present maintaining the world. He will remain involved until the end of time.

1. Material Realm. The Father made the world *“by His wisdom,”* Jeremiah 51:15. The Son holds it all together, I Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16,17. The Holy Spirit breathes life into the universe, Psalm 104:30. Without the Spirit exerting His power, the world would be a lifeless lump. As the breath of the Almighty, He gives life to everyone, Job 33:4; cf. Job 34:14,15.

2. Spiritual Realm. The work of the Spirit is most prominent in the spiritual realm. That seems obvious from His name. He was present in the birth and life of Jesus, Matthew 1:18,20. The Holy Spirit empowered Christ to proclaim the Good News, Matthew 12:18. He enabled the apostles to speak while under severe distress, Matthew 10:18-20. The Spirit also assisted the early saints in uttering the word of God boldly, Acts 4:31. Today, we have *“access to the Father”* through the Spirit, Ephesians 2:18. He *“testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,”* Romans 8:16. He thoroughly equips us, through the inspired word, *“for every good work,”* II Timothy 3:16,17. In both the material and spiritual realms, life depends on the Holy Spirit. That is equally true when considering providence.

B. Providence

The noun *“providence”* is not found in Scripture. The verb *“to provide”* occurs a dozen times.

God provides for His people. Hence, though the word is absent, the idea is very much present. The Lord is interested in the welfare of humankind. He cares. He protects. He provides for our needs.

1. General. The providence of God is visible in both a general and a special way. Each form of His providence is expressed through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is everywhere, Psalm 139:7. This means God is everywhere. He is interested in creation, Matthew 6:26-32; Luke 12:6,7. In general providence, the Spirit works through the laws of nature to perpetuate the universe.

2. Special. Sometimes the Lord interposes Himself directly in the affairs of men. This is different from working behind the scenes, out of sight, in the natural order of the universe. The special providence of heaven is the direct work of the Spirit. He saves sinners, I Corinthians 6:11. He guides the people of God, Isaiah 63:11-14. He helps the saints pray, Romans 8:26. He dwells in every believer, I Corinthians 3:16; cf. Romans 8:9; I John 3:24. Each of these actions is clearly beyond the influence of the written word. It is the direct action of the Holy Spirit. It is providence. It is the provision of heaven, the gift of God to believers.

C. Inspiration

The verb “to inspire” is found in a number of passages. The word for “inspiration” does not occur in the Hebrew or Greek. The term is supplied by translators to clarify the sense of the original language. As such, it denotes the action of Holy Spirit giving extraordinary ability to certain recipients.

1. General. The first instance of the Spirit bestowing such ability occurred in conjunction with the construction of the tabernacle, Exodus 35:30,31. Later, the Spirit gave certain warriors exceptional strength, Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25. Leadership abilities were also received through the Spirit, Number 27:18-21. These endowments of the Holy Spirit were issued to a few for the benefit of the many.

2. Special. The Spirit exercised a special influence over the authors of Scripture, II Timothy 3:16. The Spirit and the inspired writers worked closely together. However, like the mind and the words of a person, the two are distinguishable. Though the Spirit and the word are logically distinct, they are often viewed in Scripture as the same. For example, the Holy Spirit and the word of God both give birth, John 3:5 and I Peter 1:23, and bring salvation, Titus 3:5 and James 1:21. They both impart life, II Corinthians 3:6 and Philippians 2:16. The Holy Spirit and the word of God both have power, Romans 15:13 and Hebrews 1:3a. They both dwell in believers, Romans 8:11 and Colossians 3:16. This close proximity must not be mistaken for common identity. The Spirit and the word are as different as the author and the words of this book. The word without the Spirit is like an eye without light, I Corinthians 2:14. Disaster results when the two are separated. The Bible can be difficult to understand, II Peter 3:15,16.

The use of logic alone cannot unlock its mysteries. The Spirit is needed to enlighten the mind, Job 32:8; Ephesians 1:17,18; Hebrews 6:4. An equal disaster can occur when the Spirit is cut loose from the word. Fanaticism emerges. Folly takes over. There is no more certain forerunner of spiritual catastrophe than the neglect of the written word. The Spirit is dishonored when His word no longer guides the body of Christ, I Corinthians 14:36-38.

D. Influence

The Holy Spirit is active in the conversion of sinners. His influence is important in the salvation of the lost. A series of questions must guide our study. Whenever we come across the influence of the Spirit, we must ask if that influence is general or special. Is it directed toward sinners or saints? Is it temporary or permanent?

1. Toward Sinners. Speculation has clouded the conversation. It has blinded the minds of men. Extreme statements have been made. Marvelous excitements have occurred. These unusual claims and extraordinary behaviors do not render the influence of the Spirit suspect. Rather, they focus our inquiry on how the Spirit influences sinners.

(a) Human Theories. Like so many doctrines of the Bible, the work of the Holy Spirit has become a mixture of human theory and divine fact. The believer must be alert. It is easy to fall prey to the suppositions of men.

(1) Baptism Of The Holy Spirit. Some people claim that the Spirit overwhelms sinners. This "baptism" in the Spirit is believed necessary for the redemption of unbelievers. For, these folks say, "Sinners cannot be saved, if God does not save them." This understanding of the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" comes from a misunderstanding of Paul. He said, "*We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body*" (that is, into the Church), I Corinthians 12:13. The apostle was talking about water baptism, Acts 18:8. The Corinthians were "*baptized by the Spirit*" when they were buried in water. They were "baptized by the Spirit" in the same way people were "baptized by Jesus." The apostles actually did the baptizing, John 4:1,2. The word "by" in the phrases "by the Spirit" and "by Jesus" indicate "in association with" or "in view of." The converts in Corinth were immersed in water in association with or in view of the command of the Spirit to be baptized.

(2) Direct Operation Of The Spirit. Others claim the immediate operation of the Spirit is required to instill faith directly into sinners. He gives faith to those who do not possess the written word. This position presents a problem. Believers have only been found where the word has been proclaimed. Preaching somehow makes a necessary contribution to the faith of believers, Romans 10:14,15. The Spirit does not act independent of the inspired word. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is "*the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes,*" Romans 1:16.

(3) Illumination By The Holy Spirit. Some folks think that the Spirit must enlighten the mind in order for the sinner to understand the Bible. James did not see it that way, James 1:18. If one cannot comprehend the truth, without the illuminating of the Spirit, the word has to be inspired twice in order to be effective. If the Spirit has to illuminate the mind of sinners, the unbeliever is powerless to choose salvation on his own. If the Spirit has to enlighten, God becomes responsible for those who fail to believe. This is contrary to the Scriptures. Faith is a response to testimony. It is a response to the “*word of Christ*,” Romans 10:17. The Spirit cannot produce faith or forgive sin without an acceptance of the person and work of the Messiah. The Spirit does not need to empower the word. It is powerful on its own, Hebrews 4:12. The job of the Spirit is to testify concerning Jesus, John 15:26.

(b) Scripture Facts. The Holy Spirit is very active among sinners. He labors strenuously with wayward creatures. His efforts are sadly unappreciated, Galatians 3:3. Some people will ignore Him altogether. Others will start by accepting His influence but continue on as though they can succeed without Him, Galatians 5:7. Both attitudes are flawed. The Spirit is essential to our salvation, Galatians 6:8,9.

(1) Strives. God reaches out to redeem the lost. He “*contends*” with sinners, Genesis 6:3. He makes a concerted effort to win them over, II Peter 3:9. No pains are spared in the battle to convert the wicked. The Lord went the distance, Isaiah 53:4-6. He did all He could do, Nehemiah 9:30. Most people pushed Him away. In their stubbornness, they resisted the overtures of the Holy Spirit, Acts 7:51.

(2) Convicts. Sin lurks in the dark recesses of the soul. The Spirit came to expose evil, John 16:8. He “*convicts*” sinners by shining the light of truth on their sin. Those opposed to sound doctrine are confronted with the inspired message, Titus 1:9. They are “*convicted*” of their ungodliness, Jude 15. The word goads their conscience, Acts 2:37. It lays bare the thoughts, intentions, and dispositions of the heart, Hebrews 4:13. The convicting influence of the Spirit is rejected when the convincing word of the Spirit is refused, I Thessalonians 4:7,8. The results are devastating. It should be avoided at all costs. Sinners must not spurn the influence of the Spirit.

2. Toward Saints. The teachings of men are frequently presented as the doctrines of God. The extravagance of certain instructions has lead many uninformed souls astray. Caution is necessary. The influence of the Spirit on the lives of saints is acknowledged. The manner of His influence needs to be carefully examined. Several terms are used to describe the work of the Spirit among believers: “*baptize*,” John 1:33, “*drink*,” John 7:37,39, “*pour out*,” Acts 2:33, and “*anoint*,” II Corinthians 1:21,22; I John 2:20,27. Each figure of speech is designed to convey His influence among those seeking the Lord. Unfortunately, many of these figures of speech have been misinterpreted. And, because of mishandling the message, the influence of the Spirit has been distorted. It is a matter of deep concern, therefore, to correctly analyze the work of the Holy Spirit among believers.

(a) Human Theories. The Holy Spirit is active in the lives of both sinners and saints. In the case of saints, as in the case of sinners, His activity is often misunderstood. Hence, it is imperative that we scan the inspired word to know the truth of the matter, II Timothy 2:16-18a.

(1) Miracles. In the Old Testament, the Spirit was bestowed for transient purposes on certain persons. In the New Testament, the Spirit was given as a permanent gift to the whole Church, Luke 3:15,16; Acts 11:15-17. The Spirit was “poured out” on all flesh, Joel 2:28-32; cf. Acts 2:14-21. Every believer received the fullness of the Spirit. However, when the Spirit was given, miracles did not always occur. The Spirit dispenses various abilities as He sees fit. Some of these abilities are miraculous, II Corinthians 12:4-11. Some of them are not, Romans 12:6-8. Consequently, a person can receive the Spirit without receiving miraculous powers.

(2) Gifts. During the first century, the Church was miraculously gifted to speak actual foreign languages, Acts 2:6,11b. In contemporary times, some folks utter “heavenly speech.” The words are unknown to the speakers and incomprehensible to the hearers. It is not an authentic language. It is called “ecstatic jargon.” Such phenomena must follow the inspired instructions about “speaking in tongues,” I Corinthians 14:27,28. The purpose of the gifts of the Spirit was threefold: to proclaim Christ, Romans 15:18,19, to identify the apostles, II Corinthians 12:12, and to mature the saints, I Corinthians 14:12,26; Ephesians 4:7,11-13. Paul indicated that the gifts of the Spirit would cease, I Corinthians 13:8-10. These gifts were for the spiritually immature, Ephesians 4:13. The apostle urged us to “*desire the greater gifts,*” I Corinthians 12:31. These superior gifts were “*faith, hope, and love,*” I Corinthians 13:13.

(b) Scripture Facts. The Holy Spirit has a very special activity among the saints. He works endlessly with surrendered believers to perfect their spiritual lives. His labor is indispensable to the eternal salvation of the children of God.

(1) Guidance. There is a great difference between a Christian who has “life” and one who has “an abundant life.” The first hopes he is saved. The latter is certain he has eternal life. The former is converted. The latter is sanctified. All baptized believers are given the Spirit as a gift, John 7:38,39; cf. Acts 2:38; 5:32; Galatians 4:6. Yet no one can receive the benefits of the gift by simply getting wet in baptism. The believer must surrender to His influence, must allow Him to dwell inside, Romans 8:9a. It is a special gift that the world cannot receive, John 14:17. Hence, the possession of the Spirit is the test of discipleship, I John 3:24. It is the means of divine guidance. Noah was lead to build an ark, Hebrews 11:7. Abraham was guided to a strange land, Hebrews 11:8. The Spirit carried the prophets, II Peter 1:21. He protected the apostles, Matthew 10:19,20. The leading of God is not confined to yesterday. It is very much a part of our contemporary experience, Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:16,18,25. The sanctification of the saint is not automatic. It requires a deliberate effort. The new life can be lost, Hebrews 4:1. Under the influence of the Spirit, every believer makes their calling and election sure, II Peter 1:10. The Spirit is ready to help. Are we ready for Him to assist us? Ephesians 3:16-19.

(2) Comfort. The Christian lives a demanding and difficult life. These challenges would defeat any well intended saint. The followers of Christ need the encouragement of the Spirit, Acts 9:31. He comforts them by interceding for them in prayer, Romans 8:26,27. The Spirit knows what they need. He knows how to ask for it. To the saints, the Spirit is a direct pipeline to heaven. The Spirit also assures the saints that they are sons of God, Romans 8:15,16; cf. Galatians 4:6. The Lord does not leave us guessing. We draw near to God in “*full assurance of faith*,” Hebrews 10:22. Believers often shy away from considering themselves redeemed, I John 3:19,20. In spite of their reluctance, God still wants them to “*overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*,” Romans 15:13; cf. Hebrews 6:18,19; I Peter 1:8,9. Our assurance is the indwelling of His Spirit, I John 3:24; 4:13.

IV. RECEPTION AND REJECTION OF THE SPIRIT

The Spirit abides in the believer. Still there is the possibility of ignoring His presence. The saints must be fully attuned to His voice. They must carefully follow His desires, Romans 8:5. The Lord helps us work out our salvation, Philippians 2:12,13. He is happy to do so if we are receptive to His assistance.

A. Reception

The words of a person are not the person. They are merely his thoughts. The inspired word is not the Holy Spirit. It is the thoughts of the Spirit. The Bible and the Spirit are separate entities. Therefore, one can memorize the Scriptures but still not have the Spirit that inspired them. Saints can comprehend the Bible but not have the author of the Bible dwelling in them. It is possible, then, for a believer to know the word but reject the Spirit. Satan did. For that reason, Jesus told His followers to pray for the Spirit, Luke 11:13. The reception of the Spirit is more than a promise to be received, Acts 2:38,39. It is a command to be obeyed, John 20:22. His indwelling is to be welcomed. His leading is to be followed. His comfort is to be appreciated. He dwells in the believer to extent that the believer invites His presence.

B. Rejection

Humans can (and often do) reject the Spirit. God does not force us to accept Him. It is awesome to realize that we have the potential to stop the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit. We can reject His gentle encouragement. The forms of this rejection vary. The results are always the same, Hebrews 10:26-31.

1. Blaspheming. The primary meaning of the term “blaspheme” is “to speak of someone (or something) sacred in an irreverent manner.” It is a deliberate insult, misrepresentation, or perversion of the Lord. Blasphemy has always been punished severely, Leviticus 24:16. Blaspheming the Spirit “*will never be forgiven*,” Mark 3:29. It is a sin beyond forgiveness

because the Spirit is the final manifestation of divine power. He is the last hope for human redemption.

2. Despising. The Spirit is despised when He is treated shamefully. There are many today who “insult” the Spirit, Hebrews 10:29. They fail to treat Him with equal respect. They view Him as subordinate to the Father and the Son. Such disrespect is insulting. They can also insult Him by rejecting His gentle prompting.

3. Testing. Believers can push the limits to see if the Holy Spirit will respond. Ananias and Sapphira lied, Acts 5:3,4. Their actions were a deliberate testing of the Spirit, Acts 5:9. How foolish! The Spirit responded decisively. People obviously forget. They test God to see if He means what He says, Exodus 17:2. How dare we be so arrogant? Deuteronomy 6:16. The Lord is not humored by our vain attempts to challenge His sovereignty, Psalms 78:18,41,56. When God is tested, man always gets a failing grade, Psalms 95:7b-11; 106:13-15. God help those who are tempted to test Him!

4. Resisting. The Spirit is active in the world. His tender pleading is frequently ignored. Men “resist” His word, Acts 7:51. An attitude of resistance can be found among believers, Galatians 5:17. Such opposition vexes the Spirit. He is “grieved,” Isaiah 63:10. We are warned against acting that way, Ephesians 4:30. If the saints persist in irritating the Holy Spirit, they will “*put out the Spirit’s fire,*” 1 Thessalonians 5:19. We are charged to abandon our lukewarm posture, Revelation 3:15,16. We are commanded to cease resisting. Let us welcome the Spirit. Let us treat Him as an honored guest. For such He is, Ephesians 2:22.

CHAPTER IX

THE CHURCH

The Church is an enigma to many people. This is due in part because the word “church” is used in several different ways. It can refer to a building. It can point to a particular religious organization. Or the term “church” can allude to a group of people assembled for worship. Clarity about the “church” is desperately needed. The following discussion is intended to shed light on this important biblical subject.

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In a global sense, the Church includes all redeemed people throughout the earth, Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22,23; 5:25. It is the body of believers worldwide to whom Christ gives spiritual life. In the local sense, the Church is a group of redeemed people in a particular place, Acts 8:1b; I Corinthians 1:2; Colossians 1:2. The Church is the local assembly of saints. Originally a secular word, the term “ekklesia” was chosen by the first century Christians to identify the people of God both locally and internationally.

A. Definition Of The Word Church

The term “church” comes from the Greek word “ekklesia.” Among the Greeks, “ekklesia” referred to a political gathering. It pointed to a body of citizens “called out” to discuss municipal business, Acts 19:32,39,41. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the word “ekklesia” was used to identify a public assembly, Judges 21:8; I Chronicles 29:1. The Church, then, is a “called out” body of believers, I Peter 2:9.

B. Nature Of The Church

Several images of the “ekklesia” are found in the New Testament. These images illustrate the nature of the Church. They contain a rich rainbow of implications about the people of God as a family, a kingdom, a temple, and a body.

1. Family. Christians are called “*God’s household*,” Ephesians 2:19. This household is the Church, I Timothy 3:15. Members of the Church are the “*sons and daughters*” of the Almighty, II Corinthians 6:18. God is their Father, I Thessalonians 1:1. Those in the Church are “*brothers*,” Matthew 23:8. Because we are His family, we receive provisions, Matthew 6:8, protection, Romans 8:31b-34, and discipline, Hebrews 12:7-10, from our Father.

2. Kingdom. Faithful members of the Church will inherit *“the kingdom of Christ and of God,”* Ephesians 5:5. This hope propels them forward, Philippians 3:12-15. In His kingdom, Christ has all authority, Matthew 28:18. *“The Church,”* then, *“submits to Christ,”* Ephesians 5:24. His kingdom is the sovereign, eternal, and unshakable government of God, Hebrews 12:28; II Peter 1:11.

3. Temple. Believers are the *“temple of God,”* I Corinthians 3:16. A temple is where a god resides. It is a sacred place. The Church is a dwelling of God. His Spirit lives in her, Ephesians 2:21,22. Therefore, she must maintain her purity, Ephesians 5:25-27. It is an honor to be the temple that welcomes the presence of the Lord, Matthew 18:20.

4. Body. The Church is also called the *“body of Christ,”* Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18,24. This expression underlines the unity of the Church, Romans 12:4,5; Ephesians 4:4,5. His one body has many members, I Corinthians 12:14-20. The various parts of the body *“should have equal concern for each other,”* I Corinthians 12:25. The body of Christ was designed to grow when each member *“does its work,”* Ephesians 4:16. Like the members of our physical body, the Church is called to live in harmony with each other, Colossians 3:15.

C. Unity Of The Church

The Scriptures could scarcely be clearer. Christ is the head over one body, one Church, Ephesians 1:9,10,22,23; Colossians 1:18. A divisive attitude is the product of a *“sinful nature.”* Those who cause Church divisions *“will not inherit the kingdom of God,”* Galatians 5:19-21. Ecclesiastical factions are wrong. Church disagreements disappoint saints and discourage sinners.

1. Call To Unity. Believers must *“watch out for those who cause division,”* Romans 16:17. God designed the Church to live in peace, Colossians 3:15. Ecclesiastical unity is demanded, I Corinthians 1:10; cf. Philippians 2:1,2. Unity is not found in the creeds of men. The Church is held together by one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, Ephesians 4:4-6. She is glued together in the *“unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace,”* Ephesians 4:3. That is what God wants. It is what Jesus prayed for. It is what will get the attention of the world, John 17:20,21.

2. Cause Of Division. A factious spirit breeds hate toward men under the guise of loyalty to God. Church quarrels are the trademark of those who are still spiritually immature, I Corinthians 3:3.

(a) Intolerant Attitude. Divisive brethren claim to know the truth. Nevertheless, the Scriptures say, *“The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know,”* I Corinthians 8:2. What does the factious brother fail to understand? He does not realize that knowledge causes one to be arrogant, I Corinthians 8:1b. Those who know the truth also need love. Why? *“Love builds up.”* It encourages. It thinks of others as better than

oneself, Philippians 2:3. In spite of all the disagreements among the Corinthians, Paul was still proud of them, II Corinthians 7:4,14; 8:24; 9:2. That is the spirit that fosters goodwill. It brings unity among those who hold a diversity of opinions. A Church is doomed when her members cannot tolerate one another, cannot overlook differences about “*disputable matters*,” Romans 14:1-4.

(b) Inaccurate Interpretations. We are certainly required to draw lines of fellowship, to set boundaries for membership in the Body of Christ. In doing so, much care should be exercised. Three passages are often misconstrued in drawing those lines, in setting those boundaries.

(1) Statement Of Amos. Some people think the prophet Amos gave the parameters for Church fellowship. “*Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?*” Amos 3:3. From these words, it is often concluded that only those who agree with one another can fellowship with each other. But, if that was so, we would never have fellowship with anyone. For nobody agrees with anybody on everything. Amos was not talking about the boundaries of Church membership. The passage is part of a series of questions, Amos 3:3-6. The prophet was simply saying that every effect has a cause. A lion roars when it catches its prey. A trap closes when it is sprung. A trumpet is blown when danger approaches. When, then, do people walk together in the remote region where Amos lived? They walk together when they make an appointment. The word “agree” in Amos 3:3 refers to “agreeing to meet together,” Joshua 11:5; Nehemiah 6:2; Job 2:11. The term does not indicate that the parties in question met because they held the same opinions. Quite to the contrary! They met in spite of their differences. Members of the Church are “*joined together*,” not because they agree on everything, but because of their common connection in the Lord, Ephesians 2:21.

(2) Command Of Paul. There are two separate communities on earth, II Corinthians 6:14-18. One is composed of believers. The other is composed of unbelievers. One community is described as “light.” The other is called “darkness.” Christ is the leader of the former. Satan is the leader of the latter. There is no fellowship between these two groups, Ephesians 5:8-12. The family of God does not share in the activity of the world. They separate themselves from unbelievers. The command of Paul was written to shatter the shrine of idols. It must not be used to divide the temple of God, I Corinthians 3:17. A person is wrong to splinter the Church in order to form a “Paul,” “Apollos,” or “Peter” group, I Corinthians 1:10-12. Do not all immersed believers belong to Christ? II Corinthians 10:7. A divisive attitude is condemned. The saints must learn “*to love the brotherhood of believers*,” I Peter 2:17. We are commanded to “*live in peace*” with each other, II Corinthians 13:11. If we are going to be one in heaven, surely we must practice unity on earth.

(3) Teaching Of John. Everyone who is baptized into the sacred Trinity, as a penitent believer, is added to the Church. He is part of the “holy” brotherhood, Hebrews 3:1. He is a sharer “*in the promise in Christ Jesus*,” Ephesians 3:6. To all of the saved, the Lord gives a “*spirit*

of unity,” Romans 15:5,6. This unity is demonstrated in accepting one another, Romans 15:7. Saints do not fellowship because they agree. They agree because they are in fellowship, Philippians 2:1,2. God established this fellowship. The saints grow closer through an earnest desire to maintain that fellowship, Ephesians 4:1-3. God never encouraged division among believers. Yet, the followers of Christ are as divided as if He commanded it. Indeed, believers are to withhold fellowship from those who do not accept the incarnation of Christ, I John 2:22,23; 4:1-3; II John 7. The incarnation is not a matter of opinion. It is the bedrock of the Good News. When one rejects Jesus in the flesh, he rejects the Gospel of Christ. The lines of fellowship include differences of personal opinion. They do not include differences in biblical doctrine.

3. Line Of Fellowship. The cure of the party spirit is recognition that fellowship is not the fruit of agreement. Agreement is the fruit of fellowship. This puts unity above opinion. Every encouragement *“to be of the same mind,” “to agree with each other,”* and *“to speak the same thing”* was given to those who were already in fellowship, Colossians 3:12-15.

(a) Boundaries Of Fellowship. The task of man is not to draw the boundary of Church membership, III John 9,10. Our task is to discover where God drew that boundary. Our responsibility is to make only those things a test of fellowship which God made a condition of salvation.

(1) Baptism. Entrance into fellowship should coincide with the requirements for entrance into Christ, Galatians 3:26,27. All who are immersed into Jesus are part of the family of God. They are brothers and sisters of one another. They should be treated as family. Christians must respect the dignity of every baptized believer who has pledged allegiance to the Lord.

(2) Love. All of those who submit to the authority of Jesus in baptism are commanded to *“accept one another...just as Christ accepted”* them, Romans 15:5-7. The goal is not to establish a polite togetherness through a complacent conformity that ignores biblical truth. Rather, the purpose of such acceptance is *“to bring praise to God.”* Differences in opinion do not jeopardize this unity. However, a person who presses their opinion in *“foolish controversies”* must be shunned, Titus 3:9-11. The exercise of Christian liberty (to allow different opinions) is rooted in Christian love, John 13:34,35; cf. Romans 16:17-19; I Corinthians 10:23,24,31-33; Philippians 2:3,4. Everything in the Church should be done to build each other up, Romans 14:19. Only love can overcome the differences that divide brethren, I Peter 1:22; 2:17.

(b) Expressions Of Fellowship. In order to have unity in the Body of Christ, members of the Church must *“live in harmony with one another.”* They must *“be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate, and humble,”* I Peter 3:8. That is a tall order, but definitely a doable command.

(1) Reciprocity. The strong in faith “*ought to bear with the failings of the weak,*” Romans 15:1. The acceptance of the weak is not an endorsement of their weakness, cf. Galatians 2:11-14. If God can fellowship with us in our weakness, we can fellowship with our spiritual brothers in their weakness. The Lord draws the line. Those who are devoid of faith in the eternal truth must not be allowed to divide the Church, I Timothy 6:3-5,11; II John 7-11. It takes less grace to receive a brother with a different opinion than is required of Christ to receive a sinner with a defiled heart, Ephesians 5:1,2.

(2) Brotherhood. The Bible does not permit the exercise of a partisan prejudice which destroys Christian fellowship. The spirit of harmony pleads for unity in matters of faith, liberty in matters of opinion, and charity in all things. All inferences—when fairly concluded from Scripture—may be allowed. These judgments must not be bound on the conscience of others. They are merely human deductions. The faith of each believer must rest in the wisdom of God instead of the thinking of man. No inference can be made a test of fellowship. The Church is a brotherhood. That connection must not be severed by demanding conformity in optional ideas, Romans 14:1,5,7-13,17,19,22. Everyone is entitled to their opinions. No one is entitled to fabricate the facts from which those opinions are derived.

II. IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH

Numerous Churches have adopted human names, creeds, and practices. God is not pleased, II Corinthians 11:2-4,13,14. As early as the first century, people were departing from the inspired truth. The apostle Paul put the saints on notice. Believers must not fall victim to false teachers. The origin and government of the New Testament Church is unique. She stands apart from every other ecclesiastical organization. Nothing must be added to or taken from the original blueprint of the Lord.

A. Origin Of The Church

The time, place, and manner in which the Church was planted are important. It clarifies her identity. It is crucial for every believer to be a member of the Church of Christ, Matthew 15:13,14. In discovering His Church, the wounds of division in Christendom can be repaired.

1. Planned By God. The Lord intended to establish His Church long before it appeared on earth. It was a concealed truth until it became a revealed reality. It was called the “*eternal purpose*” of God. As an apostle, Paul was privileged to make “*that mystery*” known, Ephesians 3:2,3,8-11. The Church was not a last-minute idea, a stop-gap thought when Christ was rejected. No! The Church is central to the eternal plan of God, Ephesians 3:21.

2. Predicted By The Prophets. The New Testament Church was predicted by the Old

Testament prophets. They used the word “*kingdom*.” To be sure, the Church and the kingdom are not identical. Or, to state it differently, the Church does not exhaust the meaning of the kingdom. Nevertheless, the kingdom came during the ministry of Jesus, Matthew 12:27,28. Christ is the head of the Church and king of the kingdom, Colossians 1:18; Revelation 19:16. The Old Testament prophets said the kingdom would come in the days of the Roman Empire, Daniel 2:44. Deliverance would appear in Jerusalem, Joel 2:32. The kingdom would arrive with miraculous power, Joel 2:28. It would “*never be destroyed*,” Daniel 2:44. The truthfulness of these prophecies are verified by their fulfillment, Deuteronomy 18:21,22.

3. Purchased By Christ. After the prophets spoke, there were centuries of silence. Then, finally, John the Baptist stepped forward. He prepared the way for Christ, Matthew 11:7-11. He claimed that the kingdom was “*near*,” Matthew 3:1,2. Jesus also mentioned the eminent coming of the kingdom, Mark 1:15. It was just around the corner, Mark 9:1, though it had not yet appeared when Christ was crucified, Luke 23:50,51. And it still had not come when Jesus ascended back to heaven, Acts 1:6. His death purchased the Church, Acts 20:28. His disciples were told to stay in Jerusalem for the dramatic arrival of the kingdom, the beginning of the Church, Luke 24:49.

4. Planted By The Apostles. About seven weeks later, the prophecy of Joel was fulfilled, Acts 2:16-21. The predicted time and place of the great event happened just as it was foretold. The Spirit came in power. The early saints no longer looked ahead for the kingdom. They spoke of it, from then on, as a present phenomenon, Acts 8:12; 28:23; Colossians 1:13,14; Revelation 1:9. Every detail was accomplished. The Church was originated in the mind of God. She was predicted by the prophets. The death of Jesus purchased her redemption. The Church was planted by the apostles, I Corinthians 3;5,6. Nothing was left undone. The Church came into existence in 33 AD.

B. Government Of The Church

The Church is the “*pillar and foundation of the truth*,” I Timothy 3:15. She is the guardian of the faith, Jude 3. The responsibility to protect the truth is vested in her leadership, Acts 20:28-31. The elders are shepherds. They oversee the sheep. They protect the flock from predators who try to deceive the innocent, I Timothy 4:1,2.

1. Nature Of Church Government. Christ is head over the universal Church, Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:18. Qualified officers are selected to guide each local assembly, Philippians 1:1. Every congregation is responsible to take care of her own affairs, Philippians 1:27, to exercise discipline as needed, I Corinthians 5:4,5,13; II Corinthians 2:6,7. As self-governing units of the universal community of faith, these local congregations did not depend on a central organization. They took their cues directly from the Lord, from His inspired word.

2. Change In Church Government. Eventually humans laid aside the first century form of Church government. The change seemed inconsequential. The results were catastrophic. The deviation was slow. The outcome was sure. Councils, synods, and hierarchies emerged. Patterns were modified. Practices were adjusted. Precedents were cast away. The Bible no longer served as the rule of faith and polity in the Church. Human votes replaced divine precepts. The simplicity of the first century congregation was lost. The changes were not necessary. The guidance of the Holy Spirit was sufficient. No council, no association, no convention, and no society should have been set up to control the local assembly of saints. They should not have attempted to push God off His throne. Nevertheless, His sovereignty was ignored. Congregational governance gave way to centralized administration in the fourth century AD. The landscape of Christendom has never been the same since.

3. Structure Of Church Government. In the New Testament, each congregation selected her own elders, Acts 14:23, and deacons, Acts 6:3a. Specific qualifications were laid down for each of these offices, I Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9. The elders watched over the spiritual well being of the congregation. The deacons supplied physical assistance to the poor in the Church, Acts 6:1-4. The maintenance of the *ekklesia* rested on the leaders of each congregation. Local responsibilities were discharged by the local assemble of saints.

4. Purpose Of Church Government. The leadership of the local congregation was charged with keeping the saints pure, Acts 20:28-31. The Church is a sacred temple. The Lord is concerned for her purity, Ephesians 5:25-27. She is not to conform to the world, Romans 12:2; II Corinthians 6:14-7:1; James 1:27. If she becomes corrupt, the Church will lose her good standing with God, Revelation 2:5. The *ekklesia* of Christ is not a haven for sinners. She represents Christ in a wicked world. She is a light in the darkness, a lighthouse in the storm. The Lord committed His honor to her safe keeping, I Corinthians 3:16,17. She must preserve that honor. She must let her light shine, I Peter 2:12.

III. MISSION OF THE CHURCH

A worthwhile purpose is crucial to the survival of every organization. The Church is no exception. She has a mission. It is not political. It is not social. Her mission is spiritual. The Body of Christ is a missionary institution, Ephesians 3:10. Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, and raised the dead. He promised His followers they would do “*greater things*” than He did, John 14:12. Those greater things were the mission of the Church. We must never permit secondary things to take precedence over primary concerns. The Church is to evangelize the world, encourage the saints, and help the poor.

A. Evangelism

The Gospel is from God. The proclamation of the Good News is the responsibility of man. The Church was commissioned to carry His word to all the of world, Matthew 28:18,19; Mark 16:15;

Luke 24:46,47. That task is still in progress. It will continue until the Lord returns.

1. Every Christian Should Do What He Can. Evangelism is the concern of every believer, Psalm 51:12,13. It is the result of being in Christ, John 15:4; II Corinthians 5:14,15. Every Christian is commanded to do his part. If we do nothing to save sinners, our neglect will make us a party to their condemnation. Neutrality is impossible, Matthew 12:30. Not everyone can (or should) be a missionary. But everyone can be involved—one way or another—in mission. Only a few can preach the word. But all the children of God can learn to tell the story of redemption, Acts 8:4. They should be able to give a reason for their hope, I Peter 3:15. Christians cannot evangelize without God. God cannot evangelize with dedicated Christians.

2. Every Congregation Should Do What It Can. Every assembly of the saints is made up of many members. The members have different abilities, Romans 12:4-8. When each member exercises his gifts for the benefit of the whole congregation, the Church grows, Ephesians 4:16. God provides the skills. Every congregation is equipped to go. Like the first century Church, we are asked to set aside workers to take the Gospel, Acts 13:1-3. The Church is like a seed. She must die to herself before she can produce other seeds, John 12:24; II Corinthians 5:14,15,18-20. If we possess a clear understanding of the cross, we will recover the first century motivation for evangelism, I Corinthians 9:16. Each congregation can likely improve on its methods of spreading the word. It cannot improve on the agency through which the evangelism is done. The local Church is more than adequately equipped to fulfill her assignment. God planned it that way.

B. Edification

The proclamation of the Gospel is part of the assignment of the Church. When people accept the Good News, the Church is to edify the converts, Romans 14:19; Ephesians 4:29; I Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24,25. The term “edify” means to build up, to encourage. Christians are called to rally each other “*to love and good deeds*.” Instruction from the Scriptures is one way to build up a congregation. The word of God is food for the soul, Matthew 4:4; Acts 20:32. For those new to the faith, “*spiritual milk*” is necessary for growth in salvation, I Peter 2:1,2. But new born saints must not get stuck in the elementary teachings of Christianity. As soon as possible, they should move on to solid food, Hebrews 5:13-6:1a. New Christians also need to exercise their faith. They should get involved in the activity of the Church. They should volunteer to help spread the kingdom. When converts are instructed in the truth and involved in the work, the Body of Christ will be built up.

C. Benevolence

Christians must provide for themselves, I Thessalonians 4:11,12; II Thessalonians 3:10; I Timothy 5:8. Occasionally, circumstances upset the financial stability of a household. God looks approvingly on those who provide for widows and orphans, James 1:27. The Lord helps

the helpless, Deuteronomy 10:18; Psalm 68:5; 146:9. He blesses those who bless the needy. He punishes those who look the other way, Malachi 3:5. However, in spite of what was just said, the Church was never intended to be a relief agency. She was not asked to be a rehabilitation center, to mend the unfortunate segments of society. In the New Testament, every instance of Church benevolence was specifically “*for the saints*,” Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-35; 11:27-30; Romans 15:25,26; I Corinthians 16:1; II Corinthians 8:1-4; 9:1; I Timothy 5:16. Community welfare is the responsibility of individual believers, Matthew 25:31-46; Hebrews 13:16. When a Christian has a family member in need, the Church should not be burdened, I Timothy 5:4,8,16. If a widow does not have family members to help her, the Church should step in and provide her assistance, I Timothy 5:3. We do well to observe these guidelines laid down in Scripture.

IV. WORSHIP IN THE CHURCH

Every believer is required to worship God, Hebrews 13:15. The first century Church understood this privilege. She emphasized regular attendance for congregational worship, Hebrews 10:25. Private devotions were also a significant part of Christian praise.

A. Definition Of Worship

In the Old Testament, “worship” conveyed the idea of bowing down, Isaiah 44:15,17,19. It expressed an attitude of adoration, obedience, and service to a superior. In the New Testament, “worship” carries the same meaning. Worship, then, is an acknowledgement of the worth of God, Revelation 4:11. It is the desire to meet the Lord, Psalm 42:1,2. Jehovah is present with the saints when they worship, Matthew 18:20. His presence should lead to a reverent attitude, Hebrews 12:28. Confusion in the assembly during worship is unbecoming, I Corinthians 14:33a,40.

B. Attitude Of Worship

Both the “*spirit*” and “*mind*” should be engaged while in worship, I Corinthians 14:15. Without one or the other, the act of veneration is a mockery, a vain pretense. A worshipper must be sincere, Isaiah 1:10-17; Amos 5:21-24. When mindless ceremony takes the place of heartfelt praise, Church attendance is worthless, Matthew 15:7-9. Christians should present themselves to God, Romans 12:1. The Lord does not require us to sacrifice animals, to burn candles, or to bow to statues. Rather we are to worship Him “*in spirit and in truth*,” John 4:24.

C. Value Of Worship

For God, the value of worship is the effect it has on Him. He is delighted. Our adoration pleases Him, Psalm 69:30,31; Proverbs 15:8. For man, the value of worship is the effect it has on the worshipper. Worship allows humans to absorb the characteristics of the one they

venerate—whether it be an idol, Psalm 115:8, or the Lord, II Corinthians 3:1. If we become like Him on earth, we will be like Him in heaven, I John 3:2. Worship transforms the worshipper into the likeness of God, Philippians 3:20,21.

D. Form Of Worship

Worship is not a burden. It is a blessing. Therefore, believers should set aside time every day for private devotion. The Church should gather every week for public praise. When saints reach up to God, they discover that God is bending down to them.

1. Bible Study. The Bible is the textbook for Christian living. Believers study it in order to present themselves to God, II Timothy 2:15. We are required to know the will of the Lord, Ephesians 5:17. Because there is so much religious error, we should examine the Scriptures daily, Acts 17:11. We will be “filled” if we hunger and thirst for righteousness, Matthew 5:6. Bible study should begin with a desire to obey God, John 7:17. Christian worship must start, continue, and end with a careful inspection of the inspired word, Psalm 119:129-136.

2. Prayer. God speaks to man through the Scripture. Man speaks to God through prayer. Prayers are born in human need. They are sustained by the hope of a divine response. Hence, Christians are prayerful people, Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2; I Thessalonians 5:17. He who is too busy to pray is busier than God intended him to be.

(a) Characteristics Of Prayer. Whenever we pray, we should believe that God will answer, Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24. It is crass hypocrisy to ask assuming we will not receive. God does not play games. Neither should we, Philippians 4:6,7. Consequently, prayer must be offered in faith. It must be seasoned with honesty, Psalm 17:1; cf. Luke 18:10-14. Prayer must not be a speech to please men. It is a conversation with God, Matthew 6:5-8. Acceptable prayer must be coupled with righteous living, II Peter 3:10-12a; I John 3:21,22. It should be addressed to God “*in the name of Jesus*,” John 14:13,14. Prayer is asking “*anything according to His will*,” I John 5:14; cf. James 4:3. “*The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth*,” Psalm 145:18.

(b) Elements Of Prayer. The prayers of the saints can contain a variety of components. The occasion will determine the content of each petition. This means that prayer is far more than a mechanical repetition of memorized words. It is the natural expression of a heart that is keenly attuned to the needs of the situation. Therefore, prayer can be praise, thanksgiving, confession, or request. One or more of these elements can be voiced in any conversation with heaven. God has one Son who lived without sin. He has no son who lives without prayer.

(c) Effects Of Prayer. There are two outcomes of acceptable prayer. First, God will respond, Psalm 65:2; Proverbs 15:29. He may say, “Yes.” He might say, “No.” Or He could say, “Wait.” But God will say something, Matthew 7:7,8. Through Christ, then, we may approach

God with “*confidence*” Ephesians 3:12. The second effect of prayer is that man will be moved to action. Prayer must not become a crutch. God will not do for us what we can do for ourselves. Hence, we should pray as if it all depends on prayer. And we should work as if it all depends on us, Luke 18:1-8. Prayer is powerful. It is effective, James 5:16b.

3. Lord’s Supper. While eating the bread and drinking the juice, believers declare their dependence on Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, Matthew 26:26-28. This sacred act is called the Lord’s Supper because He instituted it, I Corinthians 11:20. It is referred to as the communion because the saints participate in His sacrifice, I Corinthians 10:16. Through this modest ceremony, we proclaim the death of Jesus, I Corinthians 11:26. The Lord’s Supper is taken during the Sunday assembly, Acts 20:7. Christians are urged to conduct themselves in a worthy matter, I Corinthians 11:27-29. It is a solemn feast that deserves our undivided attention.

4. Singing. Sacred hymns contribute much to the preservation of Christian belief. Singing solidifies faith in the heart. Surely the redeemed have something worth singing about, Psalm 103:1-5. When the saints gather together, they sing “*psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.*” They make music in their hearts to the Lord, Ephesians 5:19. These melodious utterances praise God, Psalm 57:7-11, admonish others, Colossians 3:16, and encourage self, II Chronicles 20:1-4,20,21; Acts 16:25. Nowhere in Scripture was singing a vehicle to entertain the Church. It was always a means of worshipping God, Hebrews 13:15. The effects of singing are legendary. It generates power to soften a hardened heart and strengthen a weakened soul, I Samuel 16:23. It releases pent up emotions that excite the mind and invigorate the will, James 5:13.

5. Giving. God owns everything, Job 41:11; Psalm 24:1; 50:11. He permits humans to use His possessions. We enter and leave this world with nothing, Job 1:21; I Timothy 6:7. Therefore, when we give to the Church, we are merely returning to God what we have received from God, I Chronicles 29:14. The Lord expects the saints to share their wealth, I Timothy 6:17-19. Our giving should not be a donation. Christians thoughtfully give each Sunday as a token of their gratitude, I Corinthians 16:2. “*God loves a cheerful giver,*” II Corinthians 9:6,7. No one should be forced to give. No one should be grieved after they contribute. Giving is a voluntary gesture of good will, Acts 4:32. The generous are blessed by their generosity, Proverbs 22:9. Those who worship in the ways mentioned above are the Church of Christ.

CHAPTER TEN

LAST THINGS

The end of time is called the “eschaton” in Greek. The “eschaton” refers to the last things. The term “eschatology” is a study of the end of history. The first mention of the last things predates the birth of Christ. The Scriptures describe individual, national, and international eschatology. In the following discussion, the eschaton of the individual is most prominent.

II. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Old Testament statements about the eschaton were greatly amplified in the inter-testamental period. The conversation about eschatology between the Old Testament and New Testament spoke of the universe as a three-tiered reality, II Corinthians 12:2. The earth was the home of man. Above the earth, where God dwelt, was heaven. In between heaven and earth was “sheol” (in Hebrew) or “hades” (in Greek), the place of the departed spirits. The realm of the departed was divided into “paradise” and “tartarus.” Each of these concepts will be studied in the following pages.

A. Time Of Last Things

Divine activity in creation reaches its final stage in the eschaton. The age to come is anticipated in time. The last things have already begun to take place. “*The powers of the coming age*” are here, Hebrews 6:5. The Holy Spirit is the “*first fruits*” of the end, Romans 8:23; cf. I John 5:13. We live in the “last days.” The end of the ages is upon us, I Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 1:2; 9:26; James 5:3; I Peter 1:20; Jude 17,18.

B. Order Of Last Things

The saints do not receive their redemption in this life, Romans 8:23-25. They still confront the corrupting influences of the world. Salvation is found in the world to come. Several events must transpire before that goal is reached, namely, death, the return of Christ, the resurrection, and the judgment. These end-of-time realities will be studied under the headings of the immediate, the imminent, and the ultimate last things.

II. IMMEDIATE LAST THINGS

Several aspects of eschatology have already been covered elsewhere in this book on Bible

Doctrines. That is especially true in the chapters on “Christ,” “Salvation,” and the “Holy Spirit.” Still more needs to be said. Our discussion will assume a linear view of time. In other words, time had a beginning. The present is a continuation of history. And, in the future, time will come to an end. Eschatology is a collection of beliefs related to the last things, to the end of earthly existence, to the cessation of time. Without a doubt, eschatology has produced an extensive array of speculative ideas within Christianity. Like the rest of this study, the major emphasis will remain on the words of the inspired text.

A. Death

The Greeks viewed death as the end. To the first century Mediterranean world, it was the natural conclusion of life. The word for “death” in Greek was “*nekros*.” The dead decay in the grave. Whatever animated the body was gone. The person had reached the final destiny of the human race. However, in the New Testament, over half of the 133 times “*nekros*” is found, it is linked with the resurrection, Acts 13:30; I Corinthians 15:12-19. Christians look forward to life!

1. Death Is A Separation. There are two kinds of death. There is physical death—a separation of the spirit from the body. This is the common experience of all humans, Psalm 89:48; Hebrews 9:27. Death crouches nearby, Genesis 4:6,7; cf. I Samuel 20:3. It reminds us of our mortality. It prods us to seek eternal life. There is also spiritual death—a separation of the spirit from God, Isaiah 59:1,2; cf. Ephesians 2:1-5. This is the common condition of all sinners, Romans 8:6a. A person, then, can be spiritually dead while physically alive, I Timothy 5:6. And, if persisted in, spiritual death will culminate in eternal separation from God (which is called the “*second death*”), Revelation 2:11; 20:14. The grim prospect of death loses its sting when one is united with Christ, Romans 8:1,2; I Corinthians 15:56,57; cf. Job 19:25-27.

2. Death Is Not An Annihilation. Physical death does not result in the cessation of existence. It is simply the departure of the immortal spirit from the mortal body, Acts 7:59,60.

(a) Proof From Reason. All thoughts of eternal life rest on the belief that God exists. From that presupposition, one can argue the possibility of immortality. Human reason cannot render an absolute confirmation. But the mind is capable of reaching a balanced probability in favor of life after death.

(1) Facts From Reality. Physical death is a separation. Since the spirit is not made up of parts, death cannot be the disintegration of the spirit. The separation in death has to do with the physical nature of man. Those who object cannot show the spirit to be a compound. Hence, they cannot demonstrate that the spirit is destructible. There is a spiritual existence beyond the present physical existence, I Corinthians 15:42-44a. Consequently, the spirit need not be confined to a physical body in order to survive. After death, there is a spiritual body, I Corinthians 15:44b-54. The physical body is only a temporary temple of the spirit. There is

no need for an earthly dwelling place once death has set the spirit free.

(2) Purpose Of Existence. Man does not attain the goal of his existence on earth. Humans are not complete when they die. God does not leave His work unfinished. Hence, there must be a hereafter to complete what was begun here. There must be an eternity to satisfy the aspirations of time. The Lord surely would not allow the spirit to lapse into nothingness after taking such great pains to create it. Without a life after death, promises of eternal life are a joke. Sustained effort to fulfill lofty dreams is impossible without a high and abiding expectation.

(3) Argument For Justice. Sinners are not always adequately punished in this life. Many are never arrested. The conscience leads humans to believe there will be retribution after death. The mere extinction of existence would hardly be a sufficient satisfaction of justice. Guilt demands a fair penalty, a just punishment, a place of suffering. Yet, if death is a cessation of life, unpunished sinners who avoid justice in time, would dodge the wrath of God in eternity. Is that fair? Is God just in letting the criminal go free? Certainly that is the wish of wicked men. It is not the will of an equitable God, II Corinthians 5:10; cf. II Chronicles 19:7; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25.

(4) Beliefs Of Mankind. Throughout history, humans have demonstrated a belief in immortality. The Indians buried their dead with bow and arrow for the “happy hunting ground.” The ancient Egyptians furnished a corpse with a map for the “journey to the unseen world.” The Gauls (in southern France) lent money on the condition that it would be repaid “in the next life.” Laplanders buried flint and tinder with their dead to furnish light for “the dark journey.” The Norsemen buried a horse and armor with their warriors for “the triumphant ride.” The Greenlanders entombed a dog with a dead child to “guide him.” Each of these practices is based on an expectation of life beyond death. The flame of immortality burns within the souls of men. It suggests the handiwork of God. The Immortal One has “*set eternity in the hearts of men,*” Ecclesiastes 3:11.

(b) Proof From Scripture. Reason provides convincing arguments for the immortality of man. The revelation of God states, as a fact, that there is life after death.

(1) Account Of Creation. The body of man was made of dust, Genesis 2:7; 3:19. At death, it returns to the ground from whence it came, Psalms 146:4. The spirit of man, on the other hand, “*returns to God who gave it,*” Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 23:46. Therefore, humans are “half dust and half deity,” II Corinthians 4:16-18. Only the body is subject to death. The spirit is eternal. Jesus referred to the death of the body and the life of the spirit when He said, “*He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die,*” John 11:25,26.

(2) Record Of The Curse. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they died,

Genesis 2:15-17. This curse referred to their separation from God, Genesis 3:23,24. Nowhere in the Bible is death depicted as an annihilation, Matthew 8:22; 25:41,46. Luke 15:32; Romans 6:11; 8:13; Ephesians 2:1-3; 5:14; I John 3:14; Revelation 3:1. The dead do not cease to exist. Hence, a person can be absent from the body but present with the Lord, II Corinthians 5:1-8; Philippians 1:21-23.

(3) Belief In Immortality. Throughout the Bible, hope in immortality is present. From the earliest times, people believed in life after death, II Kings 2:11; Hebrews 11:5. Thus, the dead were called upon for advice, I Samuel 28:7-14 (though the practice was forbidden by the Law, Leviticus 19:31; 20:27). The Scriptures contain many illusions to life beyond the grave, Job 19:25-27; Psalm 16:9-11; Isaiah 26:19; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Daniel 12:2,3,13; Acts 23:6; 26:6-8; Hebrews 11:13-16. It is obviously a misrepresentation of the inspired word to define death as annihilation.

(4) Descriptions Of The Departed. The condition of the departed does not imply a cessation of existence, Psalm 49:15. There is a termination of life on earth, Genesis 6:17; Esther 4:16. The annihilationist believes the word “perish” means “to pass out of existence.” The word for “perish” is elsewhere translated to “corrupt,” Genesis 6:11; I Corinthians 7:2, to “lose,” Psalm 119:176; Matthew 10:39,42, to “destroy,” Isaiah 49:17; I Corinthians 3:17, or to be “cut-off,” Daniel 9:26. None of these passages suggest an extinction of being. Our actions may “destroy” a brother, but the brother still exists, Romans 14:15. The death of Christ “destroyed” the devil though he still lives, Hebrews 2:14. Consequently, sinners will be “destroyed” and the wicked will be “cut-off,” Psalm 37:38; Acts 3:23. In other words, they will be punished, severed from the presence of God, II Thessalonians 1:8,9; cf. II Peter 3:6,7. The annihilationist theory has no foundation in the Bible.

(5) Promise Of Resurrection. The most conclusive proof of immortality is the resurrection of Jesus. He was raised from the dead “*by His own power*,” John 2:19,21; 10:17,18. His resurrection proves there is life after death, II Timothy 1:10; Revelation 1:18. Immortality was the quest of man from the beginning, Genesis 3:22. Since Christ returned from the dead, that which was hoped for has become a reality. That which was a dream is now a fact. The immortality of all men is guaranteed, John 5:28,29; I Corinthians 15:42-44. Death is not annihilation.

B. Hades

The Scriptures affirm life after death for both the righteous and the wicked, Luke 16:19-31. The dead are detained in “a place of the departed spirits.” In the Old Testament, that place is called “*sheol*,” Isaiah 14:9-11. In the New Testament, it is called “*hades*,” Revelation 20:13. Originally, “*sheol*” was viewed as an undesirable destination, Psalm 88:3-5. Later, the psalmist said, God was there, Psalm 139:8. A release from sheol was envisioned, Daniel 12:2. In fact, the Lord promises to throw hades into “*the lake of fire*” at the end of time, Revelation 20:14. The place

of the departed spirits is temporary.

1. Paradise. The word “*paradise*” is found only three times in the New Testament. It is where Jesus (and the penitent thief) went immediately at death, Luke 23:43. It is where Paul was during his ecstatic experience, II Corinthians 12:2. It is where the faithful have access to the “*tree of life*,” Revelation 2:7. The word “*paradise*” is a Persian term meaning “*royal park*” or “*royal forest*,” Nehemiah 2:8. After His resurrection, Jesus went “*through the heavens*,” Hebrews 4:14, that is, He was “*exalted above the heavens*,” Ephesians 4:10; Hebrews 7:26. In the interim, however, immediately after His death, Jesus went to “*paradise*.” Likely, paradise is synonymous with the “*third heaven*,” the place of the departed spirits. It is a transient station where the righteous go when they die. They remain there until the judgment. It is referred to as being “*at home with the Lord*,” II Corinthians 5:8, or being “*with Christ*,” Philippians 1:23.

2. Tartarus. Hades for the sinner is a place of bitterness. At death, the unrighteous are cast into tartarus. They remain there until the Day of Judgment, II Peter 2:4. The word “*tartarus*” is found only once in the New Testament. The term, which comes from Greek mythology, describes the realm of the wicked in hades. It is a place of temporary confinement. Tartarus is a dungeon of misery, Luke 16:23,24. It is like a pit of “*darkness*,” Jude 6. As a place of temporary detention, the occupants wail in anguish, suffer with grief, and wallow in remorse. They know their destination is eternity in hell.

(a) Wretched State. The wretchedness of tartarus is a remorse over neglected opportunities. The Scripture indicates that there is no release from tartarus, Luke 16:26. The destiny of humans at death is determined by their life. There is no second chance.

(b) Conscious State. The sinner, in the hadean realm of tartarus, is aware of his plight, his continuing punishment, II Peter 2:9. In the parable of Lazarus, the rich man was conscious, Luke 16:23. Paradise is a state of joy for the righteous. Tartarus is a place of misery for the sinner. Both the righteous and the unrighteous are detained in their assigned areas in hades until the Judgment Day.

III. IMMINENT LAST THINGS

Jesus broke the startling news. His disciples were stunned. He said, “*I am leaving*.” Then, just as abruptly, He added, “*I will return*,” John 14:1-3. These words have been a comfort to struggling saints throughout the years since the first century. The Lord is busy preparing a place for the righteous. And, when the time is right, He will return to claim those who wait for Him, Hebrews 9:28. The excitement of His return has helped many believers through the rough patches of earthly existence, Acts 3:19-21.

A. Second Coming

The return of Jesus will be far more glorious than His first coming. Instead of a baby in a manger, Christ will appear as a triumphant king, Matthew 24:30; 25:31.

1. Nature Of His Coming. The second coming of the Lord will be visible to all people, Acts 1:11; Revelation 1:7. It will be accompanied by sights, sounds, and situations that capture the attention of everyone, John 5:28,29; I Corinthians 15:50-53; I Thessalonians 4:15-18. Jesus will not return unnoticed. His second coming will result in the end of the world as we now know it, II Peter 3:10. The righteous will marvel. The wicked will cringe, II Thessalonians 1:6-10. The end will come. History will be concluded. Eternity will follow.

2. Time Of The Return. The New Testament does not identify the time of the end. God alone knows, Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7. The return of Christ will be a surprise, II Peter 3:10a. Only a fool attempts to predict it, Matthew 25:1-13; cf. I Thessalonians 5:1-3.

3. Conditions At The Return. The exact hour, day, month, and year of the second coming remains concealed in the mind of God. However, there are some clues. A couple of things will precede the second coming of Jesus.

(a) Apostasy Of The Saints. Every generation has expected His imminent coming. That is good. Christians are encouraged to be alert, to watch for the return of Christ, Mark 13:33. But, in the first century, some folks said, the Lord had "*already come*," II Thessalonians 2:1,2. The apostle Paul denied that claim. He countered their report. "*Do not let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed*," II Thessalonians 2:3. The "*rebellion*" is apparently the appearance of false teachers within the Church. These deceivers would draw many believers away from the truth, Acts 20:28-30; I Timothy 4:1; II Timothy 3:1-9; 4:3,4.

(b) Appearance Of The Lawless One. The rebellion and lawlessness preceding the return of Christ are closely connected. They are probably not identical. "*The man of lawlessness*" has no regard for the sovereignty of God, II Thessalonians 2:4. He is arrogant and self-assured. Yet his power is limited, II Thessalonians 2:6. Apparently the respect for law and order holds the lawless one at bay. Nevertheless, that restraint will be "*taken out of the way*," II Thessalonians 2:7. The "*man of lawlessness*" will deceive many, II Thessalonians 2:9,10. He will be overthrown when Christ returns, II Thessalonians 2:8.

4. Speculation About The Return. In contemporary times, another heresy has surfaced. It is also a dangerous perversion of the truth. It teaches that a certain train of events will occur before the end of time.

(a) Support For The Millennial Theory. There is one passage which, when literally interpreted, appears to support a thousand year reign of Christ on earth, Revelation 20:1-10. It is called the millennium. Support for this theory evaporates, however, when the text is studied

carefully. Millennialism says Jesus originally came to usher in His kingdom. He supposedly abandoned that plan when He was rejected. He established the Church as a temporary, stop gap substitute. Christ will return again. He will make a second attempt to usher in His kingdom. He will reign a thousand years in Jerusalem. Then, after the thousand years, Jesus will resurrect the saints who have died during those thousand years. Satan will muster his forces (though he will be defeated). And, finally, the judgment will be convened. Ironically, only one part of this whole scenario is mentioned in Revelation—the thousand year reign. And, oddly, that idea comes from one part of a passage filled with figurative illusions: a “dragon,” a “beast,” a “mark on the forehead,” and the “second death.” Should the thousand years be interpreted literally? Such an approach appears reckless. It belies common sense. Why frame a whole theory around such a questionable means of support. Is not the “thousand years” symbolic like the rest of the context?

(b) Consequences Of The Millennial Theory. A better rendering of Revelation 20:1-10 goes like this. Verses 4-6 are an explanation of what occurs during the incarceration of the devil in verse 1-3 and 7-10. The campaign of satanic deception is held in check during the reign of the saints, Revelation 20:1-3; cf. II Timothy 2:11,12. Just before the return of Christ, satan will be “*set free*,” Revelation 20:3,7. This may parallel the uprising of the “*man of lawlessness*.” The surge of wickedness will be brief. The devil will be “*thrown into the lake of burning sulfur*,” Revelation 20:10. Contrary to the millennial view, the thousand year reign is actually a present day phenomenon. Hence, one should not entertain it as a future hope.

(1) Denies Present Reign. Millennialism thinks Jesus is presently on the throne of God as a “crown prince.” Later, during the thousand years, He will reign as king. This view denies His present rule. It flies in the face of Scripture, I Corinthians 15:24-26; Revelation 1:5,6; 5:9,10. An explanation of one passage that contradicts other passages must be rejected. Unlike the millennial theory, the Bible says the Lord is the King of kings now, Revelation 17:14.

(2) Cancels Lasts Days. Millennialism rearranges history to make room for their coveted thousand years reign. For example, the Scriptures plainly state that we are living in the “*last days*,” Hebrews 1:1,2; 9:26; I Peter 1:20. Jesus will raise His followers in “*the last day*,” John 6:39,40,44. In other words, there is no room for the thousand years reign on the calendar of heaven!

(3) Makes God False. The millennial reign makes the Lord a liar, Hebrews 6:16-18. He promised to establish the kingdom in the lifetime of His audience, Mark 9:1. Either He kept His promise or He spoke falsely. The integrity of heaven is at stake. Those who believe in the thousand years reign claim that God was surprised when Jesus was rejected. He did not foresee Calvary. Really! What does that say about His omniscience? If He was blindsided once, could He not be blindsided again? Why, then, trust Him? Millennialism is not a harmless doctrine. It destroys the foreknowledge of God. It assumes the Lord broke His promise to set up His kingdom before the end of the first century.

(4) Belittles The Church. The theory of the millennial reign sees the Church as a last minute, plan “b” arrangement. When Christ was crucified, God supposedly revamped His intention to establish the kingdom on earth. In other words, millennialism assumes God redrew the blueprints. He added the Church in the revised edition. But that makes heaven appear shortsighted. It charges God with error. Paul strongly disagreed. The apostle said the Church was part of the “*eternal purpose*” of God, Ephesians 3:10,11. The *ekklesia* was always in the plans of the Almighty. Hence, millennialism, not God, blundered.

(5) Suspends The Great Commission. If the millennial theory is correct, Jesus is presently a “crown prince.” He expects to rule when the Jews make up their minds to accept Him. Hence, the Lord does not yet have “*all authority*,” Matthew 28:18. And, if He does not have all authority, the Great Commission is revoked. If the Great Commission is revoked, mission work should be suspended (since it is based on Him having “*all authority in heaven and on earth*”), Matthew 28:19,20. The millennial theory is a monstrous perversion.

(6) Demeans The First Coming. The New Testament affirms the present reign of Christ “*in heaven*,” Hebrews 1:3,8; 8:1. He rules from above until His enemies become His footstool, Hebrews 10:12,13. Isaiah foretold it. “*Heaven is His throne and earth is His footstool*,” the prophet said, Isaiah 66:1a; cf. Acts 7:49a. The thousand years reign demotes Him to His footstool. It places His throne in Jerusalem. The millennial theory makes His first coming a fiasco. That is not the way the Bible reads!

B. Resurrection

There are two resurrections mentioned in the Scriptures. When a convert is lifted from the waters of baptism, a spiritual resurrection occurs, Romans 6:4,5; Ephesians 2:1,4-6; Colossians 2:11,12. When the Lord raises the dead at His return, a physical resurrection will take place, John 5:28,29; I Thessalonians 4:16,17. The spiritual resurrection prepares the heart to welcome the physical resurrection. At the second coming, the Lord “*will transform our lowly bodies*,” I Corinthians 15:51,52; Philippians 3:20,21; I John 3:2. These new bodies are described as “*spiritual bodies*,” I Corinthians 15:42-44. The earth will also be transformed—cleansed by fire, II Peter 3:7,10,13.

(1) Importance Of The Resurrection. The resurrection is an important doctrine to Christianity. It is the hope of the faithful. The prominence given to the resurrection in the New Testament is a strong testimony to its value.

(a) Proof Of Deity. The resurrection of Christ is the affirmation of heaven of His deity, Romans 1:4. Jesus was who He claimed to be. Death could not keep Him in the grave. The power of Rome could not defeat His purpose, Acts 2:22-24. If Jesus was still in His tomb, there would be no reason, no need, and no urgency to believe He will raise us up on the last day.

(b) Reason For Evangelism. The crucifixion of the carpenter on Calvary was certainly news. But it was sad news! The high hopes of His followers were dashed. Their expectations were buried with the lifeless body of Jesus, Luke 24:13-21a. However, the resurrection changed tragedy into triumph, sadness into gladness, Acts 2:28-36. The resurrection is the anchor of the Gospel, I Corinthians 15:1-4. Without the resurrection, evangelism cannot be good news. It could be no more than an interesting story of a dead messiah. Without the resurrection, evangelism would end in a cemetery.

(c) Source Of Hope. Every aspect of the Christian life, from beginning to end, is associated, in one way or another, with the resurrection, Romans 6:8-14. The resurrection is the underpinning of our hope, the reason behind godly living, Philippians 3:7-11. He who removes the empty tomb from his faith is left hopeless.

(d) Guarantee Of Eternity. The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee of our future resurrection, I Corinthians 15:20-23. The Holy Spirit will give life to our “*mortal bodies*,” Romans 8:11. Our lowly bodies “*will be like His glorious body*,” Philippians 3:21. For many people, this is the greatest incentive to believe in heaven, I John 3:2,3. The anticipation of this grand event keeps our resolve “*firm and secure*” during the bumpy times in our faith journey, Hebrews 6:19a.

2. Objections To The Resurrection. All information on the resurrection comes from the word of God. Several arguments are issued against what the Scripture says. We will look at two of those objections.

(a) Linguistic Objection. The first objection to the resurrection says the Bible does not contain the words “*resurrection of the body*.” Therefore, it is concluded, the body is not raised. It is true the Scripture does not say “*resurrection of the body*.” Nevertheless, several passages conclusively indicate it, John 5:28,29; Philippians 3:21; I Thessalonians 4:13-17. Our present body is designed as a dwelling of the spirit on earth. When the earthly body comes out of the grave, it will be “*changed*,” I Corinthians 15:50-53. The resurrection body will be designed as a dwelling for the spirit in heaven. The physical functions of the present body will cease, Luke 20:34-36; I Corinthians 6:13a. Believers will get a spiritual body, I Corinthians 15:44. The Bible does not support a bodiless immortality, II Corinthians 5:1-3. The relationship of our present body to our resurrection body is not explained in the word of God. All speculation is beside the point. The Lord will provide what is needed, II Corinthians 5:4,5.

(b) Scientific Objection. Many are concerned by the decomposition of the body. Frequently, the remains become fertilizer for nearby vegetation. Or the corpse is eaten by an animal or a human. How can a person inhabit his body when his body has become part of an oak or a dandelion, a shark or a cannibal? There have always been skeptics. When Jesus spoke of the resurrection, theologians objected. He said they did not know the Scripture. They were ignorant of the power of God, Mark 12:24. Therefore, He scolded them, “*You are badly*

mistaken!" Mark 12:27; cf. Acts 26:8. It is a mistake to assume that all the particles of our physical body will be present in our spiritual body, I Corinthians 15:35-44. The connection between the present body and the future body is not revealed. Obviously they will not be the same body. It is like an ocean wave which travels many miles. It is the same wave though never composed of the same particles of water.

IV. ULTIMATE LAST THINGS

The word "end," like the term "last," refers to the conclusion of an action or an event. It indicates a completion or an outcome. In Scripture, the emphasis is on the action of God. His action will terminate the days of an individual, Psalm 39:4, the life of a nation, Amos 8:2, or the existence of the world, Genesis 6:13. The end is full of mystery. It can be perplexing to humans until they view it through the eyes of God, Psalm 73:16,17. The Lord presides over history. He knows the end from the beginning, Isaiah 46:10. He is in control. Regardless of how life is lived, it always leads to the Day of Judgment.

A. Judgment

The Bible represents all punishment in time as an action of heaven, Isaiah 26:9. These occasions of justice during history are incomplete. More will come. A final judgment is still ahead, Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 2:16; Revelation 20:12. The early Church viewed the last judgment as a motivation to live a godly life, II Peter 3:14.

1. Nature Of The Judgment. The final judgment will not be an invisible event (like providence). It will be a visible happening. It will take place after death, Hebrews 9:27. The Lord will return. The resurrection will occur. The judgment will be convened. The wicked seem oblivious to this solemn gathering, Job 21:7-13. The righteous know it is only a matter of time, Acts 17:31.

2. Object Of The Judgment. The purpose of the judgment is to pronounce a final verdict. God already knows what humans have done. The judgment will merely verify the rightness of His decision to detain the dead in paradise or tartarus, Romans 2:5,6; I Timothy 5:24,25; Revelation 14:13. The life of everyone is a book. The ink may have faded. But the chemistry of God will make the print readable again, I Corinthians 4:5. What has been forgotten by men will be remembered by God. Our attitudes, Matthew 10:14,15, words, Matthew 12:36,37, and deeds, Matthew 16:27, will be brought to light on that awesome day. They will determine our future, II Corinthians 5:10. In the final judgment, there will be no debate, no objection, and no appeal. The Judge will speak. The verdict will be final. The sentence will be fair.

3. Identification Of The Judge. God is the judge, Hebrews 12:23. His judicial activity is exercised through His Son, Matthew 25:31-33; John 5:22,27. While on the earth, Jesus pronounced judgment on no one, John 8:15. During His first coming, He was a Savior. On His

return, He will be the Judge. The question before us is who do we prefer to meet at the end of time: our Savior or our Judge?

4. Subjects Of The Judgment. The judgment will be a spectacular event. All humans will stand before the divine bar of justice, Romans 14:10-12. There will be no exceptions, no exemptions. Evil angels will be judged, too, II Peter 2:4; Jude 6. The good angels will return with Christ, Matthew 25:31. It is clearly better to pay the price of obedience than to suffer the penalty of disobedience.

5. Grounds Of The Judgment. The foundation of the judgment rests on the truth. *"In faithfulness, He will bring forth justice,"* Isaiah 42:3. No one will be favored over another, Romans 2:6-11. The names of the saved are written in *"the book of life,"* Revelation 3:5; 20:12,15; 21:27. The words *"prepare to meet your God"* have no terror for believers, Amos 4:12. They will receive eternal life. Sinners will be given eternal damnation. The judgment will be swift, accurate, and unyielding.

B. Final State

We come to the conclusion of our study. The end has been reached. The "final state" is the last Bible Doctrine. Nothing remains. The plan of heaven is complete. The purpose of God is finished. This closing section involves a quick peek at heaven and hell.

1. Heaven. Heaven is the final state of the saints. It is a place of constant happiness. It is called *"eternal life,"* Matthew 25:46, *"glory,"* II Corinthians 4:17, *"rest,"* Hebrews 4:10, and *"the dwelling of God,"* Revelation 21:3. The saved will *"serve Him,"* serve Him *"day and night,"* Revelation 7:15; 22:3. The grandeur of heaven will be the same for everyone. But some will apparently have a greater appreciation for it. Why? They worked longer and harder to gain it, Matthew 20:1-16.

(a) Communion With God. Heaven is where God is. When Christ returns, we will meet Him in the air. *"And so we will be with the Lord forever,"* I Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 21:3. There we will hear those wonderful words: *"Well done, my good servant!"* Luke 19:17. Heaven will be a beautiful place: no death, no mourning, no crying, no pain, Revelation 21:4.

(b) Fellowship With God. The saints will live in a new heaven and a new earth, II Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-3. The new heaven and earth will be a transformation of the old heaven and earth, Matthew 19:28; Acts 3:21. The present heaven and earth will be cleansed by fire, II Peter 3:10. The *"creation"* longs for this renewal, Romans 8:18-23. The coming *"liberation"* will be parallel to the flood in the days of Noah, II Peter 3:6,7. The paradise lost in Eden will be regained in the renovation. What exists now will vanish. What emerges from the cleansing shall remain, Psalms 102:26; Isaiah 51:6; 65:17; Hebrews 1:11,12; Revelation 21:1. The heavenly dwelling is prepared for believers, Matthew 25:34. It is ushered to earth like a bride

for her groom, Revelation 21:2,10. It will exceed our wildest dreams, I Corinthians 2:9; Revelation 22:1-5. The most important aspect of heaven is the presence of God. We will see the Lord face to face. And, perhaps, we will be allowed to sit in His lap! In other words, heaven is more than a place. It is fellowship with a Person.

2. Hell. Hell is the final state of sinners. It is a place of misery. Hell is described as “darkness,” Matthew 8:12, “eternal fire,” Matthew 25:41, “eternal punishment,” Matthew 25:46, “everlasting destruction,” II Thessalonians 1:9, the “abyss,” Revelation 9:2,11, “torment,” Revelation 14:10,11, and the “lake of fire,” Revelation 20:14.

(a) Statements Of Scriptures. “Ghenna” is the Greek word translated “hell” in English. “Ghenna” was a valley in which Jerusalem dumped her garbage. It is a fitting symbol for the eternal penitentiary of the wicked. It is where the sinner “belongs,” Acts 1:25. “Ghenna” is the loss of all that is good. It is the misery of banishment from God. The important element in the final state of both the righteous and the wicked is their emotional condition. For the wicked, it will be remorse. For the righteous, it will be celebration. The torment of hell is not the lash of the Lord. It is the loss of an opportunity. Exaggerated over-statements about the punishment inflicted by God in hell have lead many to reject the pronouncements of Christ. The word “ghenna” occurs twelve times in the New Testament. Jesus used the term eleven of those twelve times. He clearly believed in eternal punishment. Should we not believe it, too?

(b) Views Of Man. Of course, no one wants to go to hell. There is nothing attractive about it. Thus, it is common for folks to deny that it exists.

(1) Future Annihilation. Many people think that hell is annihilation. They assume that after the judgment the wicked will cease to exist. However, immortality is not added to a human when he believes. The spirit is immortal whether housed in a saint or a sinner. Everyone will continue to live after the judgment. The saints will dwell in the city of God. The sinners will live “outside,” Revelation 22:14,15. Everybody will have eternal life (though for the sinner that life will be called the “second death”).

(2) Eventual Restoration. Some folks believe the wicked will get a second chance. After the judgment, they will be put on probation. Why? God does not want anyone to perish, II Peter 3:9. But, is there another chance, a second probation? No! Luke 16:19-31. The destiny of man is determined by how he lives before the judgment, John 5:29. The decisions in this life are final, John 8:21,24. The Bible always says the judgment is based on the data generated before that awesome day, John 9:4; Hebrews 9:27,28. A second chance is not required to vindicate the justice of God. A new probation is not needed to prove the love of God. The “eventual restoration” view makes the present life unimportant. It allows sinners to have their fun. They can repent later. However, those who resist God in the present will resist Him in the future. He has no new incentives. The pain of a broken arm does not mend the break. The pain of hell will not heal the depraved soul. Suffering hardens the wicked, embitters the sinner.

Judas did not have a second chance, Matthew 26:24. Neither will anyone else.

(3) Temporary Existence. Several individuals describe hell as a temporary punishment. They twist the words of Scripture to satisfy their wish. They contend that eternal punishment is punishment in eternity (rather than throughout eternity). They claim that “*eternal*” does not imply endless. Indeed, the Greek word for “*eternal*” can occasionally refer to a limited time, Matthew 13:39; Romans 16:25; Hebrews 9:26. Yet, it expresses the longest possible duration, Genesis 49:46; Exodus 21:6. The inspired writers used the vocabulary they had. In order to describe an unending duration, they often wrote phrases like “*forever and ever*,” Daniel 7:18; Ephesians 3:21. The Bible teaches the doctrine of eternal punishment as clearly as their language allowed. They applied the term “*eternal*” to persons and things that were by nature endless, Romans 16:26; I Timothy 1:17; 6:16; Hebrews 9:14; I Peter 5:10; Revelation 1:17,18. The same word describes the sufferings of the wicked and the joys of the righteous. The misery of the one will be as long as the happiness of the other, Matthew 25:46. Hell is eternal, Matthew 12:32; Mark 9:43; Luke 3:17; II Thessalonians 1:9. Heaven is eternal, John 6:47; 10:28; 17:2; Romans 6:22,23; II Corinthians 5:1; I John 5:11. The question throughout this study has been where do we want to go after this life? Bible Doctrines has been written to clarify that choice. It deserves serious thought. It begs for an immediate decision.

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