

A Simple Explanation of Christian Doctrine

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of
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Doctrine**

By Pastor Randy Moll

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Preface

This “Simple Explanation of Christian Doctrine” was written, in large part, for my children and grandchildren, that they might have a simple explanation of the basic teaching of God’s Word, the Bible, and believe on their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is my desire that they know and consider the truth I have believed and taught, and it is my prayer that they too will see that this is not my doctrine but that of our Lord Jesus Christ, clearly taught and revealed in the pages of God’s Word, the Bible. And for this reason, I dedicate this brief work to them.

But this simple explanation of the Bible’s teaching might also be of benefit to others as they seek to know Christ Jesus and what He has done for their salvation and the salvation of all people. It might guide them in their search for the truth and in learning the true doctrine revealed in the Holy Scriptures. I offer this simple and brief explanation of Christian Doctrine to the public in the hope that it will prove helpful to others and that they too will place their faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior.

Scripture quotations in this work are taken from the King James Version of the Bible. Though the older English of the KJV may prove a little more difficult for some, its accuracy and faithfulness to the original languages is unsurpassed.

Pastor Randy Moll
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How did life and all things begin?

How is it that this world and the universe came to be? How did life begin and why does it go on? Is it all the result of chance over extreme lengths of time? Or is it the result of an intelligent creator who wisely designed and created all things?

While many have speculated and theorized, there is one eye-witness account of how all came to be and who is behind it.

Many scoff and criticize this account and offer alternative theories with no foundation in truth in an attempt to escape the accountability which goes along with the creation account, but wisdom calls upon us to seek the truth and accept it, along with any accountability which accompanies that truth.

That one eye-witness account is recorded for all to know in the first two chapters of Genesis. It is the account of the Creator Himself, recorded by Moses for all to read and know the truth.

That account begins: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Genesis 1:1-3).

Please take the time now to read Genesis, chapters one and two.

Who is the Creator?

Who is the Creator? The Bible, which is God's inspired account, tells us that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

And, who is this God? The Hebrew word Elohim, which is the plural form of God, is the name used to describe the Creator (cf. Genesis 1:26-27). He is also called by the name Jehovah (some pronounce it Yahweh or Yehovah), often translated LORD.

"These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens" (Genesis 2:4).

The Bible further defines God, when it says: "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him" (1 Corinthians 8:6). Thus we see that all things were created by God the Father through Jesus Christ.

God's creation account also tells us that, in the beginning when God created the heaven and the earth, "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2). And so we see that the Holy Spirit, too, was active in the creation of all things.

The opening verses of John's Gospel tell us: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:1-4). We learn that the Word, Jesus Christ, identified in verse 14 as God Himself in the flesh and the only-begotten Son of the Father, created all things and is the giver of life, both physical and spiritual.

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In St. Paul's letter to the Colossians, the inspired Scriptures say of Christ Jesus, that He is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Colossians 1:15-17).

So, who is the Creator? It is God, the God the Scriptures identify for us as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Though God is one – "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4) – God is also three – thus, the command to "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). This is why the God of the Bible is often called the Triune (three/one) God, because He is one God and yet three distinct Persons. The Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God. Yet, there are not three Gods, but one God.

The Bible tells us "there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (1 John 5:7).

Though beyond our ability to comprehend, this is how God has revealed Himself to us – it is His account and His word. And it is this God who has created all things and given us life.

How did God create the heavens and the earth?

Again, the Bible says: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light...” (Genesis 1:1-3; Read all of Genesis 1 and 2).

The Hebrew word for “created” in verse one is bara and indicates that God created all out of nothing. He called it into existence by saying, “Let there be,” and “There was.”

The Scriptures echo this truth throughout.

Psalm 33:6 says: “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.”

Hebrews 11:3 says: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

These words teach us the truth that God created all things and sustains them by the power of His word.

The Bible says of the Son of God, in Hebrews 1:2-3: “Whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power....”

So, what has God done? He created all things out of nothing. He created and called all into being by His all-powerful word. And, it is by that same creating word that all continues to exist.

It is as Nehemiah wrote: “Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee” (Nehemiah 9:6).

What about angels? How did they come to be?

The Bible teaches that the LORD God, when He created the heavens and the earth, also created a great number of angels to carry out His commands and do His will.

The Bible says that God “maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire” (Psalm 104:4; cf. Nehemiah 9:6; Exodus 20:11; Colossians 1:16; Psalm 103:20-21; Daniel 7:9-10).

It describes the angels as spirits of great power and strength when it says: “Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure” (Psalm 103:20-21; cf. 2 Kings 19:35).

According to the Bible, a large number of these angels sinned and fell away from the LORD God shortly after the creation (cf. Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:9). The Bible speaks of the devil (or Satan) and the other evil angels who fell away with him being reserved unto the judgment of eternal torment in hell (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Matthew 25:41).

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The Bible also warns us that, until the last day, these evil spirits continue to oppose God and His will and seek the destruction of God's works, especially seeking to lead believers away from God and back into sin and unbelief. It tells believers to "be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8; cf. Genesis 3:1ff.; Revelation 12; John 8:44; Job 1-2; Matthew 4:1-11). It cautions followers of Christ to "put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:11-12).

The great number of angels who remained faithful to the LORD God are now, according to the statements of God's Word, confirmed in their holy estate and continue to carry out God's commands and serve the needs of Christians. God tells us in His Word that His angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). Jesus says in regard to the angels who watch over little children who believe that "in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10; cf. 25:31). And, the Bible assures us that God "shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone" (Psalm 91:11-12; cf. 103:20-21).

When did God create the heavens and the earth?

Again, the Bible answers that question for us when it says: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth...” (Genesis 1:1).

Though some would attempt to extend the six days of creation into long periods of time and others would introduce a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 with the claim that the angels were a part of an earlier failed creation, the Bible is quite clear that the six days are literally six days. “And the evening and the morning were the first day” (Genesis 1:5), with the same parameters mentioned of each day. “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day” (Genesis 1:31).

The Bible also makes clear that all things were created within the six days when it says: “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day” (Exodus 20:11); and, “Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee” (Nehemiah 9:6).

When did the six days of creation occur? While it would be a mistake to make a doctrinal issue out of a specific date or year, the Bible’s genealogical records indicate that creation occurred approximately 4,000 years before Christ, or approximately 6,000 years ago – numbers which can be calculated based on the ages of the patriarchs when sons were born to them, the lengths of

kings' reigns and other dates or events in the Bible, such as the exile and destruction of the temple (e.g., Genesis 5 and 11; 1 and 2 Kings; 1 and 2 Chronicles).

Though the Bible contradicts modern "scientific" theory regarding the age of the earth, there is no contradiction with the true evidence which suggests a young earth and a catastrophic and universal flood (Genesis 6-8). Believers accept the accuracy of God's account of creation which is recorded for them in the pages of the Bible.

How did God create man?

The Bible answers that question for us when it says: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:26-27).

It further explains how the first man was created in Genesis 2:7: "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

Of the creation of woman, God's Word says: "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and

brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:18-25).

The first man and woman were created in the image of God, with His likeness. This does not mean they looked like God, for God is a spirit. It means they were like God in that they knew God and His will and gladly and willingly lived for God in accord with His will and purpose in creating them (cf. Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24; Ephesians 2:10). They knew God, loved Him, trusted Him and were of one heart and mind with Him in their thoughts, desires, words and deeds.

We learn from the Scriptures that God formed the body of Adam (man) from the dust of the ground and breathed life into him, making Adam a living soul. He was given life, both physical and spiritual. He was made alive to God.

We learn that the first woman was created from the first man and for the man to be a helper and companion to him who was like him and fitting for him. She was indeed flesh of his flesh.

Though many in our time would deny it, this is also the reason for marriage between a man and a woman. God created the

woman for the man, brought her to the man and the two became one flesh. Any sexual union outside of marriage between a man and a woman is contrary to God's purpose and design in creation.

Though we may think we exist only as the natural result of the sexual union between a man and a woman, the Scriptures teach us that we are no accident. God created each of us in the womb of our mother and gave us life. Not only did He bless man and woman with the ability to have children (Genesis 1:28), He creates and forms each of us in our mother's womb.

The Bible says: "For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalm 139:13-16).

What happened to man and creation?

"What happened?" we might ask. When God created the heavens and the earth, everything was good. Adam and Eve walked in communion with God and were not ashamed. Now, the earth is full of evil and violence. Instead of loving God and seeking to honor and serve Him, people are self-centered and

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use and abuse others. They lie and gossip and slander. They are dishonest and steal. They lust and commit adultery and even rape. They hurt and murder.

This once-perfect world is now full of heartache, disease and death. It produces thorns and thistles and forces people to work hard all their lives to survive. People become old and sick and, ultimately, everyone dies.

What happened? Genesis 3 describes the historical events which changed everything for mankind and for God's creation.

Please stop now, open your Bible and read Genesis 3.

The devil, also called Satan, used God's commandment in Genesis 2:16-17 to bring about man's condemnation and bring a curse upon all of God's creation. God had forbidden Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of one tree in the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

"And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17).

Notice how the devil worked: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1). He planted the seed of doubt and made it appear that God's command, which was intended for good, was somehow holding them back and keeping them from being like God, knowing good and evil.

Then the devil lied. When Eve answered, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (v.2-3), the devil said, "Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat

thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (v.4-5).

Then Adam and Eve fell. “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (v.6).

The devil used God’s good commandment to bring about man’s condemnation and death. They disobeyed and ate, and they died spiritually, losing their relationship with God, and also became subject to physical death and eternal death and condemnation. As the Bible says in Ezekiel 18:20, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

And what was the result? Adam and Eve were afraid of the LORD God. They hid from His presence and sought to cover up their sinfulness and shame (read v.7ff.). They passed the blame and ultimately blamed God Himself. Their heart changed from one of love and trust and honor toward God to a heart of fear and rejection, and their sin brought about the sin of all mankind and a curse upon all of God’s creation.

God’s Word describes it this way in Romans 5:12: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

Consider the curse their sin brought upon the earth – a curse we see still active in our world today: “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt

thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:16-19).

The fruits of their sin were evident. Cain killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4). Wickedness spread upon the earth. Instead of having faith and trust in the Almighty God who created man and all things, man’s heart was only evil from his youth (Genesis 6:1ff.; 8:21; 11:1ff.). Every one of us has been conceived and born into sin, spiritually dead to God and His enemy (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12; Ephesians 2:1ff.).

Sin brought about not only spiritual death – the destruction of man’s relationship with God – but physical death and the ultimate condemnation of all to eternal death and torment in hell (cf. Genesis 3:19; Romans 6:23a; Matthew 25:31-46).

Why is our world such a messed up place? Why do we have to work hard all our lives? Why do we grow old and die? Why are there evil, violence, wars, disease and death? Why are people afraid of God and so often trying to hide themselves from God by avoiding the Bible and churches which still teach the Bible? The answer is in Genesis 3. We turned away from God and disobeyed His commandment. We sinned against the LORD God who made us and brought upon ourselves sin, evil and death. We are born into this world dead spiritually. We all die physically and return to the dust of the ground. And we all are under the condemnation of God’s law to eternal death and the everlasting fires of hell.

Our only hope is also mentioned in Genesis 3 in God’s words to the serpent in verse 15: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

This ancient promise speaks of one to be born of woman who would crush the devil's head and undo the work he accomplished in the garden. In the process, His heel would be bruised. The Seed of the woman, God the Son born a man of the virgin Mary, would suffer and die for the sins of the world but would rise again victorious, having accomplished the redemption of all mankind.

The Bible explains in Galatians 4:4-5: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Cf. Hebrews 2:14-18.

What has God done to save man and to restore His creation?

Man's fall into sin, described in Genesis 3, changed everything in God's good creation. As a result, all of us are born into sin and evil fills the earth. We must work hard to earn a living. We suffer pain and illness and, finally, we die and return to the dust of the ground. And with Adam and Eve, we stand condemned on account of sin to eternal death and damnation. But as we heard from Genesis 3:15, God promised the Seed of the woman to crush the serpent's head and undo his evil work.

What has God done to save man and to restore His creation? Perhaps the most simple and clear answer to this question is recorded for us in the words of John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

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Though God is a just God who must punish sin, His first desire for each and every one of us is that we might be saved from eternal condemnation and punishment and live forever in fellowship with Him. In order to provide salvation for fallen and sinful mankind, God sent His own Son into this world as a true man to take our place under God's law and fulfill it for us, and to suffer and die upon the cross to bear the full punishment and condemnation for the sins of all people.

God promised a Savior from the beginning, immediately after the fall of Adam and Eve. He said in His words to the serpent: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

God's Word tells us: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:4-5; cf. Hebrews 2:14-17).

Since man was unable to fulfill the righteous demands of God's law and could not make atonement for his own sinfulness, God sent His only-begotten Son into this world, born miraculously of the virgin Mary, true God and true man (cf. Luke 1:26ff.; Matthew 1:18ff.).

God's Son, Jesus the Messiah, or Jesus Christ, lived a sinless life under God's commandments. He walked in perfect fellowship with God the Father in heaven. The Bible tells us that He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). It calls Him, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26); and compares Him to, "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19).

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In obedience to the Father, He then went to the cross and was forsaken and condemned of God the Father that He might suffer the full and just punishment for the sins of all mankind (cf. Matthew 27:46).

The Bible tells us: “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:5-6).

Again, the Bible says: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). The Bible tells us that “if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1,2).

The Bible tells us “that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Because Jesus died for our sins and rose again, God’s wrath against our sins is satisfied and He is gracious to us. He reaches out to us with mercy and forgiveness. Through faith in Jesus and His blood shed for us upon the cross, God’s pardon and forgiveness become our own – they are imputed to us for righteousness, we are forgiven and acceptable in His sight for Christ’s sake – and we have life everlasting in God’s eternal kingdom.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without

blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace..." (Ephesians 1:3-7).

How does the redemption won for all by Christ Jesus become our own?

The sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden brought sin and death to us all. We were born into this world, dead in our trespasses and sins, as St. Paul wrote to the believers at Ephesus (Ephesians 2:1ff.). But God provided a remedy for our lost and condemned estate when He sent His Son into the world to fulfill all righteousness and to bear upon the cross the full and just penalty for the sins of all mankind. But how does this salvation provided by God through His Son, Jesus Christ, become our own? How are we saved from our just condemnation?

We learn from God's own Word, the Gospel, that God, for the sake of Jesus Christ's holy life and innocent sufferings and death upon the cross for the sins of the world, extends and offers to us and all people of this world His pardon and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. He reaches out to us in mercy and with forgiveness and

offers to us all the blessings Christ won for us, desiring that we simply look to Him in faith.

The Bible tells us that Jesus is “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29); and that “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1,2). It tells us that “all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). It says that “he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself” (Ephesians 1:6-9). It tells us that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:23-26).

Therefore, we are justified (declared just and righteous) and receive the forgiveness that Christ Jesus earned for all when we believe the Gospel message which makes known to us Christ’s

atoning sacrifice and offers and gives to us the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting which He earned for all when He suffered and died in our stead and then rose again. God's forgiveness and pardon become our own through faith in the Gospel – when we trust that God is indeed gracious to us and forgives us all our sins for Christ's sake.

Again, the Bible says, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47). It says, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Romans 4:5-8); and "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

The opening verses of Psalm 32 (verses 1-6) make clear that God forgives the sins of the penitent – those who acknowledge their sins to the LORD God and look to Him for mercy and forgiveness in Christ Jesus – but does not forgive the sins of the impenitent (cf. 1 John 1:7-10; Matthew 16:19; 18:15-18; John 20:23; Mark 4:11-12). We are reconciled to God by means of the atoning sacrifice of Christ Jesus through faith – "if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel..." (Colossians 1:23).

Therefore, the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation which Jesus won for all when He suffered and died upon the cross and rose again become our own through faith – by believing the

Word of God which tells us that God pardons and justifies sinners for Jesus' sake.

As we have seen, the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus Christ died for all and satisfied God's just wrath against (or made atonement for) the sins of all mankind. And the way the benefits of Christ's redemption and atonement are credited to us and become our own are not by our own works or righteousness under the law, but through faith and trust alone in Christ Jesus and what He has done for us – his holy life and His innocent sufferings and death in our stead.

Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life..." (John 3:16).

To rightly understand the true doctrine, I must also here point out that Bible does not teach that God declares sinners just and righteous apart from faith in Christ or that faith itself, as a human work, is the cause of justification instead of the atoning sacrifice of Christ and the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

How does one come to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior?

The Bible makes it very clear that we are born into this world dead in our sins and cannot of ourselves come to faith in Christ Jesus or trust in Him. It is only by God's gracious working through the Gospel that anyone is saved.

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Jesus Himself said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:44).

The Bible says in Ephesians 2:1-10: “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

The Holy Spirit, working through the Word of God (cf. John 3:1ff.), reveals to us our utter sinfulness and the just condemnation we deserve on account of our sins; but He also reveals to us that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God in human flesh, fulfilled the law for us and suffered our punishment when He was crucified and put to death upon the cross. He assures us that because Christ died for our sins and rose again, God’s wrath against sin is appeased and God offers and gives full pardon and forgiveness for Jesus’ sake. The Holy Spirit calls us to believe and take comfort in the fact that in Jesus we have redemption, that “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7; cf. 1 John 1:7 – 2:2; Ephesians 1:6-7).

It is God the Holy Spirit who creates faith in our hearts which believes that God is merciful and forgiving for the sake of Christ Jesus and His death upon the cross. The Spirit, through the Word, convinces and assures us that in Christ Jesus we have forgiveness and in Christ Jesus we have life eternal.

Jesus said: "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

John wrote: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).

What does it mean to repent or be converted?

True repentance consists of a troubled conscience, or godly sorrow, over one's sins and sinfulness and of faith in God's mercy and forgiveness for the sake of Jesus Christ and His innocent sufferings and death upon the cross for our sins and the sins of the whole world. It is a coming to the knowledge and conviction of one's utter sinfulness and of the punishment of God justly deserved and a turning to God in faith, trusting that He mercifully forgives our sins and accepts us as His own dear children for the sake of Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice upon the cross (Psalm 51; Psalm 32; Romans 3:9-28; Mark 1:4, 15; Acts 2:36ff.; 3:19; 20:17-21; 26:20; Isaiah 55:6-7; Luke 24:45-47; 2 Corinthians 7:9-10; Ephesians 1:3ff.; 2 Peter 3:9).

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A fruit or result of genuine repentance is a new and amended life lived for our God and Savior (Luke 3:3, 7-17; Acts 26:20; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Romans 6:1ff.; 1 John 1:5-10; 2:1-6; Isaiah 1:16-20; Ephesians 2:8-10).

Repentance and conversion are entirely the gracious working of God in us, for it is His Spirit who, through the Word of God, convicts us of our sinful ways and shows to us the condemnation we justly deserve (cf. John 16:7-11); and the Holy Spirit also, through God's Word, offers and gives to us comfort and forgiveness through faith in the holy life and innocent sufferings and death of Christ Jesus in our stead (Matthew 9:2; 1 John 2:1-2; Ephesians 1:3ff.).

The Bible tells us in Titus 3:3-7 that "we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Again, St. Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus (Ephesians 2:1-10): "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love

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wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

A true Christian lives his life here in this world in continual and daily repentance; that is, he continually acknowledges his sins and failures to the LORD God and continually receives in faith God’s mercy and forgiveness for Christ’s sake – as well as the needed help and strength to amend his life and live for the LORD God who redeemed him. The Bible says: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 1:8 – 2:2. cf. Psalm 32; Psalm 51; Ephesians 1:15-23; Philipians 4:13).

The Bible clearly calls false the teachings of some that true believers do not sin and do not need to continue in repentance, that God cannot bring a fallen believer back to repentance or that God will not forgive those who have fallen and returned to repentance (cf. 1 John 1:7 – 2:2; Psalm 32; Psalm 51). Instead, the Bible teaches us that the Lord is “good, and ready to forgive; and

plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee” (Psalm 86:5).

What about good works?

Are they necessary?

While no one can be saved by his good works because of the sin and imperfection which permeates all we think, say or do, God does desire and command that we do good works.

The Bible tells us that “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isaiah 64:6). Even our best-intentioned works still come short because of the sin which dwells in us and prevents us from truly loving God with all our heart, soul and mind and truly loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. Thus, our works cannot and do not make us righteous in God’s eyes and cannot and do not merit God’s favor.

We are righteous and holy in God’s eyes, not by our own works, but by the works and merit of Christ Jesus, who fulfilled all the righteous demands of God’s law for us and then bore our punishment when He suffered and died upon the cross in our stead. Thus, Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us through faith and not by works.

Again, the Bible says in Romans 3:21-28: “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them

that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”

To the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul also wrote: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10). Thus, we see that our salvation is entirely of the grace of God, apart from works, from start to finish. Even the faith by which we trust in our crucified and risen Savior for forgiveness and life everlasting is God’s gracious gift and not of our own will or decision. Yet, it is God’s desire and purpose for us who are saved by grace that we do good works – that we begin to do those things for which God originally created us and then recreated us in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, we say that good works are not necessary for salvation, but they are necessary because God our Savior commands them. We say that a man is not justified by works, but a man who is justified through faith in Christ Jesus does good works.

And what are good works before God? God reveals to us what He wills and desires of us in His Word. The Bible says: “He hath

shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8). "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalm 119:9-11). "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105).

The Bible also tells us that "without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). And Jesus said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). Thus, one cannot live for God or do any works acceptable in His eyes apart from faith in Jesus Christ; for only through faith in Christ can one truly love God and serve Him, and only through faith in Christ is the sin which infects all our works pardoned and forgiven.

How does God offer and give us His grace?

Even though Jesus Christ fulfilled all righteousness for us, suffered and died for the sins of all mankind and rose again in triumph, His atonement would be of little benefit to us if God did

not reach out to us and communicate and share with us the good news that our sins are paid for in full and that through faith in Jesus we have forgiveness, are accepted as children of God and have a place in His everlasting kingdom.

The Bible teaches that God offers, gives and assures to people the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation which Christ won for all by His innocent sufferings and death on the cross through certain means: namely, through His word of the Gospel, Christian Baptism and the Lord's Supper. It is through these means that God the Holy Spirit graciously makes known to us God's gift of salvation in Jesus Christ and assures us that, for Christ's sake, we are forgiven of all sins and have everlasting life in heaven.

That is why Jesus commanded His disciples to go into all the world and "preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15); to "teach [or disciple] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20); that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations" (Luke 24:47); and to observe His Supper and so proclaim His death and remember Him and the sacrifice He made to redeem us from our sins (1 Corinthians 11:23ff.).

The Bible says: "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15); and, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

The blessings Christ won for us are also communicated to us through the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Bible says: "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness

which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4-7); “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16); “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:26-28).

And, as we have seen earlier, it is the Holy Spirit who works through these means to bring us to faith and keep us in faith. Jesus said, “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). The apostle Paul wrote to the believers at Philippi: “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

What is the Gospel?

The Gospel is the good message and announcement that Jesus Christ, God’s only-begotten Son made flesh, suffered and died and made atonement for the sins of the world, and then rose again in victory. It is God’s good news to you and to me that, because of what Jesus did for us when He shed His blood and died upon the cross for the sins of all, our sins are paid for in full. It is God’s word offering forgiveness and life everlasting by which

he reaches out to us in mercy and with pardon and forgiveness toward us.

The Bible tells us: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19); “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:16,17); “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13); and, “And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh” (Ephesians 2:17).

Jesus proclaimed the Gospel to the paralytic when He said, “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee” (Matthew 9:2); and to the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet, when He said, “Thy sins are forgiven” (Luke 7:48). It was the Gospel which Jesus proclaimed when He said: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24). And it certainly was good news to the dying thief who looked to Jesus, when Jesus said: “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

So, the Gospel is the means whereby God offers, gives and assures to us – to you and to me – the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting which Jesus won for all by His holy life and innocent sufferings and death upon the cross in our stead. And the Holy Spirit, working through the Gospel, creates and sustains faith in

our hearts whereby we believe and trust that God forgives us, accepts us as His own dear children and gives to us the everlasting joys of heaven.

What does God work in us through Baptism?

Christian Baptism was instituted and commanded by Jesus when He told His disciples: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach [disciple] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Jesus’ disciples also taught that all people should be baptized. Peter said: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:38-39). And Jesus’ disciples baptized those who came to faith in Jesus, at times baptizing whole households (Acts 2:41; 8:12,38; 16:15; 1 Corinthians 1:16).

Children (including infants and young children) are to be baptized since they are included in Jesus’ words “all nations” and “every one of you” and “your children.” The Bible also calls baptism a “circumcision made without hands” (Colossians 2:11-12), and circumcision under the Old Covenant was performed on the eighth day. Nowhere does the Bible ever say

that children should not be baptized until they reach a certain age or that children are innocent and without the need of having their sins washed away.

Nor does the Bible ever specify the mode in which baptism is to be performed. The Greek word for baptize simply means to wash with water, and New Testament usage of the word “baptize” bears this out. Thus, whether one is fully immersed or has water poured or sprinkled upon him is not an issue.

The true and important issues which the Scriptures teach regarding Baptism are the following:

1. Baptism – or applying or washing with water – in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is not man’s work but God’s work – water is applied in God’s name and He works through it. Jesus said, “Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19); and “And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:10-12).

2. Baptism conveys and assures to us the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life which Christ Jesus won for all by His holy life and innocent sufferings and death upon the cross. Peter said, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38); and Saul (the apostle Paul) was told by Ananias, “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

3. The Holy Spirit works through Baptism to bring us to faith in Christ Jesus, wash away our sins in Jesus' blood and regenerate us with a birth from above. Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:5-8). The apostle Paul wrote to Titus: "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:4-7).

4. Through Baptism, God brings us into a New Covenant relationship with Him whereby we are children of God and have the promises of the covenant; namely, forgiveness of sins and the eternal blessings of heaven. Paul writes to the churches in Galatia: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26-29). Quoting from the prophet Jeremiah, the writer to the Hebrews states: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt;

because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Hebrews 8:8-12). Later, he writes: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised...)” (Hebrews 10:19-23). As circumcision was the sign of the Old Covenant, so Christian Baptism is the sign of the New Covenant in which we are joined to Christ in His death and resurrection and receive the benefits of His atoning sacrifice; namely, the forgiveness of all our sins and a place in God’s eternal kingdom (cf. Colossians 2:8-15).

Therefore, the Scriptures teach that Baptism has been instituted by God to be a means whereby He offers, gives and assures to an individual the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation which Christ won for all by His innocent sufferings and death upon the cross (Colossians 2:11-15; 1 Peter 3:21; Galatians 3:26-29). In Christian Baptism, water is applied (by sprinkling, pouring or immersing) in the name of the Triune God (Matthew 28:19); and through Baptism, the Holy Spirit works to create and preserve saving faith, thus washing away sins and giving eternal

salvation to all who believe (John 3:5; Titus 3:5; Acts 22:16; Mark 16:16).

The Scriptures teach that all people are to be baptized – including infants and children, for they too can believe – and that those who reject Baptism forfeit the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation which God would give them through it (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38-39; Luke 18:15-17; John 3:5-6; Matthew 18:6; Luke 7:30).

Why baptize infants and young children?

Since so many in our day do not bring their children to Christ Jesus in Baptism and speak against those who do, I include this special chapter regarding their false arguments and the true teaching of the Scriptures.

God's Word says: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:38-39).

Even though this passage of Scripture commands "every one" to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and says the promise is also "to your children," there are many who believe and teach that infants and small children should not be brought to Christ through Holy Baptism. We look at their arguments against infant baptism and the answer of God's Word. And, we look at the reasons why,

according to the Word of God, infants and small children indeed should be baptized. Please take the time to look up and study the Bible references below.

I. Arguments against Infant Baptism answered by God's Word

A. False Argument: Babies are not sinful or are not accountable for their sins.

Romans 3:23 says: "All have sinned." This includes infants and children.

Romans 5:12 says that sin and death are passed on to all because of Adam's sin.

Ephesians 2:1-3 teaches that we were all dead in sin by our natural birth.

Psalms 51:5 teaches that we were sinful (without true fear, love and trust in God) from the time of our conception and formation in the womb. As a result, acts of sin soon followed.

Genesis 8:21 says: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."

Nowhere does Scripture teach that a person is not accountable for his sins until he reaches a certain age. Rather, the Scriptures do say: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20).

B. False Argument: Infants and small children cannot believe on Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Matthew 18:6 – Jesus says: "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me..."

Luke 18:15-17 says that when "infants" were brought to Jesus, He said, "Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you,

Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.”

Jesus wants infants and children brought to Him. Through faith in Jesus, they too become a part of God’s kingdom. If one will not, like a little child, humbly trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation from sin and eternal death, he will not enter God’s kingdom or be saved.

John 1:12-13 teaches that no one – not even an adult – can come to faith in Christ of his own will or decision. One must be born of God.

John 3:5-6 teaches that one must be born again of water and the Spirit (Holy Baptism) to enter the kingdom of God. Natural birth leaves one dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1-3). Being born of the Holy Spirit through “the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5), which is Holy Baptism, makes one alive to God. Children too need this spiritual rebirth to enter God’s kingdom.

C. False Argument: Baptism is only an outward profession of what has already taken place inwardly and is simply done in obedience to Matthew 28:19.

Acts 2:38-39 teaches that Baptism is for “the remission of sins,” and that the Holy Ghost is given in Christian Baptism.

Acts 22:16 teaches that one’s sins are washed away in Baptism. The Scriptures say, “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

Titus 3:5 teaches that regeneration (new spiritual life) and salvation are given in Baptism (Cf. 1 Peter 3:21).

Matthew 28:19 teaches that God works through Baptism, for it is done in His name. “Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost....”

A Simple Explanation of Christian Doctrine

Baptism is a means whereby God offers and gives the forgiveness of sins and eternal life which Christ won on the cross to people. Baptism is God's work, not man's.

D. False Argument: Jesus doesn't want infants and small children brought to Him in Baptism.

Luke 18:15-17 teaches that Jesus wants infants and small children brought to Him and into His kingdom.

John 3:5 teaches that being born of water and the Spirit in Baptism is God's means to bring a person into His kingdom.

E. False Argument: Scripture never says that infants and small children are to be baptized or that they were baptized.

Acts 2:38-39 commands "every one" to be baptized and says the promise is also to your children.

Matthew 28:19 says "all nations" are to be baptized.

Infants and Small Children are nowhere excluded from these commands.

Colossians 2:11-12 says that Baptism is the circumcision made without hands, and, according to Genesis 17:9-14, circumcision was performed at eight days old.

Acts 16:15, 33; 1 Corinthians 1:16 tell of whole households (very likely including infants and young children) being baptized.

F. False Argument: Matthew 28:19-20 says to "teach" first and then "baptize."

The Word translated "teach" in verse 19 literally means "to disciple," and is different from the word "teach" in verse 20. The Greek indicates that we are to teach (or disciple) all nations by going out, baptizing and teaching. Baptizing is mentioned before the teaching and thorough indoctrination.

G. False Argument: Infant Baptism was not practiced in the days of the apostles, but was later introduced into the church.

This too is false. Tertullian (b. 150 A.D.) opposed infant Baptism but acknowledged its universal practice; Origen (b. 185 A.D.) says that infant Baptism was an “apostolic tradition”; and Augustine (b. 354 A.D.) wrote books against heretics who disapproved of the Baptism of children. History makes it clear that infant Baptism was practiced from the apostles onward (cf. Eph. 2:20).

The following is intended not as irrefutable evidence, nor as the first line of an apologetic in defense of infant Baptism. The Scriptures themselves, especially the Scriptural teaching regarding sin, grace and faith, as well as the command to baptize all nations and every one, form the clear basis for the practice of infant Baptism. However, these passages do present the clear practice of infant Baptism in the ancient church from the time of the apostles up through the fourth century.

Polycarp (about 69-155 A.D.), a disciple of the Apostle John, was baptized as an infant. This enabled him to say at his martyrdom. “Eighty and six years have I served the Lord Christ” (Martyrdom of Polycarp 9:3). Justin Martyr (100-166) of the next generation states about the year 150, “Many, both men and women, who have been Christ’s disciples since childhood, remain pure at the age of sixty or seventy years” (Apology 1:15). Further, in his Dialog with Trypho the Jew, Justin Martyr states that Baptism is the circumcision of the New Testament.

Irenaeus (About 125-202 A.D. – student of Polycarp who was a student of the Apostle John): “For he came to save all by means of himself – all, I say, who by him are born again to God – infants, children, adolescents, young men, and old men” (Against Heresies II.22.4).

Hippolytus (about 170-236 A.D.): “And they shall baptize the little children first. And if they can answer for themselves, let them answer. But if they cannot, let their parents answer or someone from their family. And next they shall baptize the grown men; and last the women” (Apostolic Tradition 21.3-5).

Origen (about 185–254 A.D.): “I take this occasion to discuss something which our brothers often inquire about. Infants are baptized for the remission of sins. Of what kinds? Or when did they sin? But since ‘No one is exempt from stain,’ one removes the stain by the mystery of Baptism. For this reason infants are baptized. For ‘Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven’” (Homily on Luke 14:5).

[After quoting Psalm 51:5 and Job 14:4] “These verses may be adduced when it is asked why, since the Baptism of the church is given for the remission of sins, Baptism according to the practice of the church is given even to infants; since indeed if there is in infants nothing which ought to pertain to forgiveness and mercy, the grace of Baptism would be superfluous” (Homily on Leviticus 8:3).

[After quoting Leviticus 12:8 and Psalm 51:5] “For this also the church had a tradition from the apostles, to give Baptism even to infants. For they to whom the secrets of the divine mysteries were given knew that there is in all persons the natural stains of sin which must be washed away by the water and the Spirit. On account of these stains the body itself is called the body of sin” (Commentary on Romans 5:9).

Cyprian (died 258 A.D. in Carthage, North Africa): “In respect of the case of infants, which you say ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after birth, and that the law of ancient circumcision should be regarded, so that you think that one who is just born should not be baptized and sanctified within the

eighth day, we all thought very differently in our council. For in this course which you thought was to be taken, no one agreed; but we all rather judge that the mercy and grace of God is not to be refused to any one born of man ... Spiritual circumcision ought not to be hindered by carnal circumcision ... we ought to shrink from hindering an infant, who, being lately born, has not sinned, except in that, being born after the flesh according to Adam, he has contracted the contagion of the ancient death at its earliest birth, who approaches the more easily on this very account to the reception of the forgiveness of sins – that to him are remitted, not his own sins, but the sins of another” (Letter 58 to Fidus).

Augustine (354-430 A.D.): “For from the infant newly born to the old man bent with age, as there is none shut out from Baptism, so there is none who in Baptism does not die to sin” (Enchiridion; ch. 43).

H. False Argument: The rejection of infant Baptism is not a serious matter.

While one cannot be saved – even if baptized – apart from faith in Jesus Christ (Mark 16:16), to reject infant Baptism is serious. Luke 7:30 tells us that the Pharisees and lawyers rejected God’s counsel when they rejected John’s Baptism.

John 3:5 teaches that one who rejects Baptism cannot enter God’s kingdom.

Matthew 18:6 says: “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

It is no small matter if one brings about the eternal ruin of a child by preventing him from being baptized. Only in Christ is there forgiveness! (1 John 1:9; 2:1-2).

II. Why, according to God's Word, Infants and Small Children should be Baptized

A. They are sinners in need of forgiveness and salvation (Romans 3:23; Psalm 51:5).

B. Scripture commands that they too be baptized (Acts 2:38-39; Matthew 28:19; Luke 18:15-17).

C. Fathers are commanded to bring up their children in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4), and this includes bringing them to Christ in Baptism.

D. In Holy Baptism, the Holy Ghost works to create saving faith in Jesus Christ and to regenerate (Acts 2:38-39; Titus 3:5; John 3:5-6). Baptism is the means which God has appointed to do this saving work in infants and small children.

E. In Holy Baptism, they are offered and given forgiveness of sins for the sake of Jesus' innocent sufferings and death on the cross (Acts 2:38-39; 22:16; Colossians 2:11-14).

F. In Holy Baptism, they are given new life and are empowered to live for Jesus Christ, their Savior (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12-14; 3:1).

G. In Holy Baptism, eternal salvation is given to all who believe (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Titus 3:5; Galatians 3:26-29).

Conclusion

This then is why we baptize infants and small children as is commanded in Acts 2:38-39 and Matthew 28:18-20. This is also why our Baptism is valid and we are blessed through it today – even if we were baptized many years ago as infants or small

children. For Christ's sake – because of His innocent sufferings and death for the sins of all people – God, in our Baptism, has given us forgiveness for all our sins, His Holy Spirit, and eternal salvation. God grant that we treasure our Baptism and what God has worked in us through it. Amen.

What is the Lord's Supper? How are we to observe it?

There is much confusion about the Lord's Supper in churches today. Human explanations and interpretations have crept in because it is difficult for people to understand what the Lord's Supper is all about and what really takes place, and few actually believe and teach what the Bible teaches on this important and faith-strengthening means of grace.

What does the Bible teach?

In Matthew 26:26-28, we read: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

On the night Jesus was betrayed, He instituted His Supper as a testament and means to offer, give and assure to His disciples the forgiveness of sins and life eternal He was about to obtain for them by His death upon the cross. As they partook of the bread and wine He gave them, they also – in a way we cannot fully grasp and understand by our natural reason – partook of His

body given into death for them, and of His blood shed for the remission of all their sins.

As God's people in Egypt partook of the Passover Lamb which was sacrificed that the angel of death might see the blood upon the door posts and lintels of their houses and pass over them, so Jesus' disciples were and still are given to partake of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29) that God might pass over them in judgment and grant them forgiveness of sins and life everlasting for the sake of Jesus and His innocent sufferings and death upon the cross for the sins of the world.

Jesus' institution of this Supper is recorded in three of the four Gospels: Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20. The apostle Paul also wrote to the believers in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:23-29): "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

In each account, Jesus says of the bread, "This is My body," and of the wine, "This is My blood." Paul's account also makes clear

that those who partake of the bread and wine unworthily are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord and fail to recognize and discern that they are partaking of the body of Christ given into death for them and of the blood of Christ shed for the remission of all their sins.

Paul also wrote to the believers in Corinth: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Thus, Bible-believing Christians believe and teach that, when the Lord’s Supper is observed according to Christ’s institution – bread and wine are consecrated with God’s Word and distributed to believers in accord with Jesus’ command – Jesus offers and gives to those who partake of the bread and the cup in His Supper not just bread and wine, but His body and blood which were given and shed upon the cross for the remission of all sins.

Those who partake of Christ’s Supper with a penitent heart and faith in Christ’s words receive assurance of the forgiveness of sins and the eternal salvation won for them by Christ’s atoning sacrifice, but those who partake of Christ’s Supper in impenitence and without faith in Christ and His words partake of the Supper to their own condemnation, not discerning the Lord’s body and treating the blood of the covenant by which they were redeemed as an unholy thing (Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32; Hebrews 10:29).

It is for this reason that faithful Christian churches receive at the Lord’s Table only those who profess the true Christian and Biblical doctrine and are able to examine themselves and exclude others who have not yet been instructed in the true Christian faith or continue to live in open disobedience to God’s Word (1

Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:28; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Romans 16:17; Ephesians 5:11).

We are to observe the Lord's Supper regularly today because Jesus commanded us to do so in remembrance of Him and to proclaim His death as a sacrifice for sin until He comes again to receive all believers to Himself in heaven (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:23ff.; Luke 22:19f.). Though the Bible does not demand that Christians observe the Lord's Supper at every service, certainly Jesus' words telling us "this do in remembrance of me" will encourage churches to observe His supper often for the benefit of believers.

Since the Scriptures are clear that Jesus used bread and wine (unleavened bread and the cup of blessing or fruit of the vine in the Passover meal), Christians (in faithfulness to Christ's testament) continue to use unleavened bread and grape wine in their observance of Christ's Supper today.

Whose Word is the Bible?

Why do we study it?

Sad to say, even among those who call themselves Christian, many do not regard the Bible as God's unerring word. Rather, they view it as any other book written by men and pick and choose what they believe to be true and what they regard as opinions of another time which are not binding today. But true followers of Christ Jesus have a different attitude toward the Bible, that of Jesus, who regarded every word of the Scriptures as God's revealed truth.

Jesus said, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17-18). The Law and the Prophets was what the Old Testament Scriptures were called, and a jot is the smallest Hebrew letter and a tittle, the smallest part of a Hebrew letter. Jesus regarded every letter, even the smallest part of a letter, true and important.

He also said, when referring to the wording of the Old Testament Scripture: “The scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). And, in rebuking those who did not believe in Him, Jesus said: “Ye have not his [the Father’s] word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:38-39). Jesus called the Scriptures the word of God the Father and told His hearers to search the Scriptures because they testify of Him and His work.

Jesus said: “Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it” (Luke 11:28). And, Jesus, when praying for His disciples, said: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

Bible is true throughout

Believers in Christ Jesus believe that each and every word, as well as the entirety and whole, of the Bible was given by inspiration of God and is therefore the true and unerring Word of God, for that was the view of our Lord Jesus and that is what the Scriptures say of themselves.

The apostle Peter wrote in his second epistle, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:19-21). The prophecies of Scripture are called a sure word because they were not written by the will or decision of men. Rather, they were written when the Holy Spirit moved men to write, gave them the thoughts they expressed and guided them in the words they used to express those thoughts.

St. Paul wrote to Timothy, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God...” (2 Timothy 3:16); and to the church in Corinth, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:12-13). The Scriptures are called God-breathed or inspired because they are the words and truths taught by the Holy Spirit Himself.

Of David, the writer of a great many of the psalms in the book of Psalms, the Bible says this: “Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue” (2 Samuel 23:1-2).

The Scriptures, like Jesus, testify to the truthfulness of all of the Bible. In Proverbs 30:5, we read: “Every word of God is pure.” Psalm 119:160 says, “Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever.”

It is because the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God that the Bible, which is made up of 66 books and letters written by about 40 human authors over a period of almost 2,000 years, is in total accord and agreement throughout. That's something not found outside the Bible.

The Word of God has not been lost or corrupted

Though many believe the Word of God has been lost, at least in part, or corrupted over the centuries since it was first recorded, Jesus' testimony and the teaching of the Scriptures say otherwise. Jesus said: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come ... Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:14, 35). Jesus said the Gospel will be preached unto the end of time as a witness to the nations and, though heaven and earth pass away, His words will not pass away. And, again, He said: "Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18).

The Scriptures themselves, which are the Word of God, testify: "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89); "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever" (Isaiah 40:8; also quoted in 1 Peter 1:23-25).

Therefore, followers of Jesus believe the Word of God has been faithfully preserved by God down through the centuries as a witness to all the nations, that it is still accurately recorded in the Hebrew and Greek texts and manuscripts, and that it can be read and studied in faithful Bible translations such as Luther's German Bible, the King James Version, Webster's Common Version and the Revised Common Version of the Bible.

And, since the Bible is the Word of God and every letter is important, followers of Jesus reject and discourage the use of texts and translations of the Bible which are unfaithful to the preserved texts and corrupt the Word of God. In fact, God warns against it when He says: “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:2); “He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully” (Jeremiah 23:28); “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:18-19); and, “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18-19).

Bible is only source and judge of Christian doctrine

Since all of the Bible is God’s true and unerring Word, followers of Jesus believe and teach that the Bible is to be the source and judge of all Christian doctrine. What is not in accord with God’s Word is not to be taught as Christian doctrine. Christians believe and teach as Christian doctrine only what is taught in the Bible, nothing more and nothing less!

A Simple Explanation of Christian Doctrine

It is as Isaiah wrote: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). Jeremiah also wrote: “The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD. Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour. Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:28-32).

Psalm 119:128 reveals the attitude of a true believer to God’s Word when it says: “Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.”

St. Paul wrote to Timothy: “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

And, the Scriptures hold up the example of the Bereans, who “were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

People often say there are many ways to interpret the Bible, but there is really only one right way and that is to interpret it as God intended it to be understood. Therefore, followers of Jesus look to the Scriptures to find the correct interpretation of Scripture. Christians let the Bible be its own interpreter; thus, passage interpretations which are not in agreement with other clear passages of Holy Scripture are rejected as erring interpretations. Remember that “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:20-21). Isaiah wrote: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20).

Followers of Jesus read and study their Bibles and listen to God’s Word

Finally, followers of Jesus diligently study and hear the Bible for it reveals to mankind the only way of salvation, which is through faith in Christ Jesus, and it guides the Christian in living according to God’s Holy will. The Scriptures “are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15); and we read and study the Scriptures because they testify of Christ Jesus to give us a knowledge of Him and all He has done for our salvation (John 5:39). As John wrote, those things recorded for us in the Bible “are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31). And, of course, followers of Jesus read and study their Bibles and listen attentively when it is read and explained because, as the psalmist

says: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105).

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...” (Colossians 3:16).

What is prayer? Why does it work?

Prayer is not a means of grace by which God offers and gives forgiveness and life everlasting, but it is an act of worship in which Christians call upon the LORD God with their hearts and voices, offering up praise and thanksgiving to God and making requests of Him.

David prayed: “Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation” (Psalm 5:1); and, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer” (Psalm 19:14). Thus, prayer can be words spoken by the lips or simply the meditation of our hearts.

Prayer is indeed an act of worship in which we give to God thanksgiving and praise for His goodness and mercy and His many blessings upon us. Again, David prayed: “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies...” (Psalm 103:1-4). Psalm 95:1-6 says: “O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For

the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.”

Though prayer is not a means of grace, it is a great privilege which God gives to those who trust in Christ Jesus for their salvation. John writes in his first epistle: “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:11-15).

St. Paul wrote to the believers at Rome: “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). Jesus also said: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you” (John 16:23). In the book of Hebrews we read: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)” (Hebrews 10:19-23).

God commands His children to come to Him in prayer and promises to answer the prayers of those who have saving faith in Christ Jesus. God says: "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Psalm 50:15). Jesus said: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). He also said that He is "the way, the truth, and the life" and "no man cometh unto the Father, but by" Him (John 14:6).

Therefore, every true Christian should and will desire to pray in Jesus' name regularly and in all things. Again the Bible says: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6); and, "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

What is the Holy Christian Church?

Who is a part of it?

There are many organizations in this world which take the name church, but the Bible teaches that there is only one church of Jesus Christ, made up of all who trust in Him alone for salvation. Local churches which teach God's Word and administer Baptism and the Lord's Supper according to Christ's institution are rightly called churches because believers and members of Christ's one true church are found wherever God's Word is

preached in its truth and purity and the Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) are administered according to Christ's institution.

When Jesus asked His disciples who they believed Him to be, Simon Peter answered for them all: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). "And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:17-18). Not upon Peter (Petros), but upon the rock of Peter's confession (petra) Jesus promised to build His church, promising that the gates of hell would never overcome her.

The Scriptures also say in 1 Peter 2:4-6: "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded."

In Ephesians 2:8-22, we read: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no

hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Cf. Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23-32; Romans 12:4-5; 8:9).

Thus, all who are graciously brought to faith in Jesus as their Messiah and Savior are brought into this one church (ekklesia, the Greek word for church, literally refers to an assembly of those called out) and temple made up of believers in Christ Jesus. As there is only “one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6), so there is only one holy catholic (meaning “universal” and not the Roman Catholic Church or any other denomination) church made up of those who are counted holy and righteous through faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice upon the cross. This Church is made up only of true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ – of those who have despaired of their own righteousness before God and are called out of this

world to faith that God is gracious to them and forgives all their sins and counts them righteous and holy for the sake of Jesus Christ and His redemptive work on the cross (Philippians 3:8-9).

This church is invisible, in that God only, and not man, can see faith in the heart. "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Timothy 2:19; cf. 1 Samuel 16:7; Luke 17:20-21).

Nevertheless, the Holy Christian Church does and will continue to exist in this world wherever the saving Gospel is still in use, for God's Word will not return to Him without accomplishing His purpose. The Bible says in Isaiah 55:10-11: "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (cf. Matthew 16:18; 1 Kings 19:8-18; Romans 1:16-17). The Bible also tells us in Romans 10:17 that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

What are local churches?

Who are really members?

The Holy Scriptures speak not only of the one Holy Christian Church which is made up of all believers in Christ, they also speak of local churches or congregations of believers. And so we consider the questions: What are local churches? Who are really members?

A Simple Explanation of Christian Doctrine

We see that there are local churches from the teaching of the Bible. The apostle Paul wrote “unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1 Corinthians 1:2); “unto the churches of Galatia” (Galatians 1:2); and “unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:1). Jesus directed the apostle John to write “unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea” (Revelation 1:11).

God’s Word also commands believers in Christ, in every locality, to gather together with other faithful Christians and form congregations where they may establish the public ministry and mutually care for and encourage their fellow believers in the true and saving faith. In Matthew 28:18-20, we read: “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

The Bible says: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the

manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:19-25).

We are also commanded: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16; cf. Ephesians 4:1-16).

And, we have the example of the New Testament believers in the church at Jerusalem who “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

That the ministry of the Word is to be established in local congregations, we also see from Scripture: “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (Acts 14:23); “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Titus was also told by the apostle Paul: “For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: if any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:5-9; cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Jeremiah 23:3-4).

Jesus also, when instructing His disciples about how to deal with those who are overcome by faults, commanded as the final

step to be taken: “And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican” (Matthew 18:17). Since it would be impossible to take such a matter to the entire church made up of all believers in Christ, Jesus is commanding such matters be taken to the local church or the assembly of believers in a certain locality or place.

Though the Bible speaks of one Church, made up of all true believers, and of local churches, there are not two kinds of churches; for even in the local churches, only the believers are truly members of Christ’s Church in that place (1 Corinthians 1:2; Romans 1:7).

On the Last Day, the unbelieving and hypocrites who are outwardly connected with Christ’s Church (or churches) in this world will be separated from the believing and cast into the fires of hell (Cf. Jesus’ parables in Matthew 13:24-43, 47-50).

How should we practice church fellowship?

Since Jesus commanded us to disciple the nations by going, baptizing in the name of the Triune God and teaching them to observe all which Jesus taught and commanded (Matthew 28:18-20), and since Jesus warns against false prophets who come to us in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7:15-23), we, as Christians, are to discriminate between churches and teachers which are faithful to Christ and that which is taught in His Word (orthodox churches and teachers) and those which are not

faithful to Christ and His Word (false and heterodox churches and teachers) and to practice church fellowship (joining together in those things which one would do with fellow believers, such as worship, prayer, reception of the Lord's Supper, evangelism, mission work, etc.) only with those who are faithful to Christ and His holy Word.

Jesus said: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). For this reason, the early church "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

That we not be led astray from the truth, the apostle Paul warned: "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself" (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

Thus, we see that we are commanded to continue in Jesus' word and doctrine – the teaching of Holy Scripture – and to avoid and withdraw from those who teach otherwise and do not consent to the words of our Lord Jesus and the teaching of the Word of God.

So serious is the threat of false doctrine and the deception of the devil, God's Word warns us: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1); "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11); "Be ye not unequally

yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18); “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16:17-18); “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds” (2 John 9-11); and “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us ... And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thessalonians 3:6,14).

Christians, like the believers at Berea (Acts 17:11), compare what is taught with the Word of God and reject those churches and teachers who remain unfaithful to the Word. They condemn as sin the unionistic practices of our day in which church

fellowship is practiced and church union is sought without regard for full adherence to the Scriptural Doctrine.

And, a church's faithfulness to Christ and His Word is to be judged, not only by its acceptance of and subscription to an orthodox creed or confession, but by what is actually taught and practiced in the church.

As the apostle Paul warned, errors in both doctrine and practice will continue to trouble churches in this world (Acts 20:28-32; 1 Corinthians 11:19). But those churches which are faithful to Christ and His Word will, through Scriptural admonition and discipline, continue to combat and remove such error from among themselves and be faithful to Christ (Matthew 18:15-18; 2 Timothy 3:13-17; 4:1-5; Titus 3:10-11).

Christians remember that every lie and false teaching is of the devil, the father of lies (John 8:44), and the devil's intent is to mislead God's elect and weaken or destroy their faith in Christ Jesus. Therefore, Christians cannot and do not view doctrinal errors and teaching which is not in full agreement with the Bible as a trivial thing which can be ignored or overlooked. They use God's Word to expose it, reprove it and remove it. And, if a church or teacher rejects the sound teaching of God's Word on a matter, Christians are commanded to reject and avoid the church or teacher until there is repentance and a return to the truth. And not to do so could even give the devil the opportunity he seeks to lead people away from faith in Christ and destroy their souls.

This is a most serious matter and yet many laugh and scoff and say it's only a little thing, a minor point. But, how many of you would drink water from a well which was poisoned even if the amount was small? What might not immediately kill you could do

damage over time. So also with false doctrine; it is never harmless and, over time, it will weaken or destroy faith.

What is the public ministry? Why did God establish it?

People and churches have a wide variety of opinions about the public ministry and who may hold the office; but the Bible, which is God's Word, reveals to us God's will in regard to the public ministry, what it is and who may hold the office. And so, we consider the questions: What is the public ministry? Why did God establish it? and Who may hold the office?

God has given to His Church, the congregation of all true believers, the right and duty to preach His Word, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer the Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper), and He has commanded that faithful men be called and ordained to publicly preach and teach God's Word and administer the Sacraments in His Church.

In 1 Peter 2:9 we read: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." Thus, all Christians are priests to God and are called to proclaim His wonderful works.

And, before His ascension, Jesus said to His disciples: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and

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teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus told His disciples (John 20:21-23): “Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” Also, in Mark 16:15-16, Jesus’ disciples were commanded: “ Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” And, in Luke 24:46-47, Jesus said: “Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

Also, of the Lord’s Supper, which Christ Jesus instituted on the night of His betrayal, Jesus said: “This do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24); and “This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:25).

Therefore, Christ’s Church, to the end of time has the right and duty to preach forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name, to baptize in the name of the Triune God and to observe the Lord’s Supper.

The Word of God, however, also tells us of God appointing ministers to oversee congregations and to feed and nourish God’s flock with His Word.

In Jeremiah 23:3-4, the LORD God said: “And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. And I will set up shepherds over them

which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD." He also adds the injunction to those feeding God's flock: "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully" (v. 28).

In Hebrews 10:25, God commands His people not to forsake "the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." In Acts 14:23, we learn that the apostle Paul and his companions "ordained them elders in every church, and ... prayed with fasting," and "commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." To the elders of the church in Ephesus, Paul said: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). To Timothy, Paul wrote: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:1-2). Paul also commanded Titus to "set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city" (Titus 1:5). The Word of God also says that our Lord Jesus Christ "gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Thus, we see that believers are to gather together in congregations to hear and learn God's Word; and men are to be called through the Church as shepherds and pastors to oversee the Church of God, feed God's flock with His pure and unadulterated Word and administer the Sacraments among them according to Christ's institution.

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The qualifications for men to be chosen and called as pastors are given us in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, and only men meeting these qualifications are to be entrusted with the pastoral office. According to 1 Timothy 3, those qualifications include being “blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity ... not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” In Paul’s letter to Titus, we learn that these qualifications also include “holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.”

Though the public ministry of Word and Sacrament exists by the will and command of God, those holding this office have no authority and power but the Word of God (1 Peter 4:11; Hebrews 4:12; Romans 1:16-17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Thus, obedience must be rendered to the public ministry only when the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed and applied.

The Bible commands: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17; cf. Luke 10:16).

Though it has become popular in our day to put women into the office of the public ministry, God’s Word says, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience,

as also saith the law” (1 Corinthians 14:34); and, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence...” (1 Timothy 2:11-12). In obedience to God’s Word, followers of Jesus reject as contrary to God’s will, and as sinful, the current practice of placing women into the public ministry or into other positions or offices where they must teach or exercise authority over men.

What are the proper roles of church and state?

We hear a lot these days about a separation of church and state, especially from those who do not wish for Christians to impose their moral values on others via government. And, there are some who would use the powers of civil governments to force people to accept or at least acquiesce to certain religious rules and values. Here, we look at what God says regarding the proper roles of church and state.

Both the Church and the State are ordained of God – the Church for the eternal salvation of men, and the State for the maintenance of external righteousness and order among men in this world.

When Jesus asked the disciples who they believed Him to be, Peter replied: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16); and Jesus said that, upon this truth which the Father had revealed to Peter, Jesus would “build His church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (v. 17-18). Jesus also

said: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32).

On the other hand, the Scriptures say of the government: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Romans 13:1-4); and, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well” (1 Peter 2:13-14).

While the State – civil government – bears the sword to maintain order, punish evildoers and wage just wars, the Church uses and is ruled by the Word of God.

The Bible says: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16); and, “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for

reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

In order that men might be saved, the Church has been commanded to preach the Word of God and proclaim Jesus Christ crucified as the Savior of mankind. Jesus commanded His disciples to “go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16; cf. Romans 1:16-17; 10:15,17).

To maintain civil order and righteousness in this world, civil governments have been given power and responsibility to enact just laws, punish evildoers (including the use of the death penalty), and to wage just wars (1 Peter 2:13-14; Psalm 82:1-4; Genesis 9:6; Romans 13:3-4).

As Christians, we reject as contrary to the Holy Scriptures any attempt to mix the powers of the Church and the State, such as attempting to enforce the practice of any religion or religious belief with the powers of civil government, or attempting to usurp the powers of civil government by any visible organization or outward form of the Church (cf. John 18:11,36; 2 Corinthians 10:4-6; Ephesians 6:10-18).

Also rejected by Bible-believing Christians is any attempt by civil governments or branches of civil governments to restrict the Church or its teachers from preaching and teaching any part of the Biblical doctrine.

And, when civil governments depart from their God-given duties and forbid what God commands or command what God forbids, Christians must obey God rather than men even if they must suffer the earthly consequences (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29; Luke 12:4-5; Daniel 3 and 6).

What is God's gracious election?

Some teach that fallen man still has a free will and can choose to believe or not to believe. Others teach that God predestines some to be saved and others to be damned. Which is right? Can a sinful human being make a decision to accept Christ of his own will or choosing? Or, is a person saved or damned because of the irresistible will of the Almighty God? We look to the Bible, which is God's Word, for God's answer and find that neither of the two teachings above is correct.

God's Word teaches that God, from eternity, graciously chose His elect and pardons and justifies them when, through the preaching of God's Word, they repent of their sins and trust in Christ Jesus and His atoning sacrifice on the cross. And, He promises to preserve them in that faith by the Spirit's gracious working through Word and Sacrament unto the end, and finally to glorify them and grant unto them eternal life in His kingdom. This election and choosing of God are entirely of God's grace and mercy in Christ Jesus, without any merit or worthiness on the part of man.

The Bible teaches us, as believers, that God "hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:9-10).

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The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, wrote: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3-12).

Thus, we see, as believers, that God already knew us as His own dear children through faith in His Son, Christ Jesus, and chose us for salvation before the foundation of the world (cf. Matthew 22:14; Acts 13:48). He did so, without any merit or worthiness on our part, but solely of His grace and mercy in Christ. In time, He sent His Son into the world, a true man, to make atonement for the sins of all; and He sent to us His Word and Spirit that we might hear of Christ’s sacrifice for us and place our faith in Him. And He continues this gracious working in our lives through His Word and the Sacraments, moving us to continue in repentance and faith in Jesus, our Savior, until we are brought into His eternal

kingdom in heaven where we will be perfectly conformed to Christ's image and reign with Him forever.

The Word of God to the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14) reads: "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

God's Word also says (Romans 8:28-30): "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

Therefore, this doctrine of Scripture gives to believers the comfort and assurance that "He which hath begun a good work in [them] will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

Though God, entirely of His grace, predestined believers to come to faith in Christ Jesus through the hearing of the Gospel and be saved, He did not predestine anyone to be damned. Christ died for all, and God truly and sincerely desires the salvation of all people.

The Word of God teaches us that "God our Saviour ... will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Timothy 2:3-6).

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In 2 Peter 3:9, we read of God's promise of impending judgment: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Why then, are some condemned? The Bible tells us: "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11); and, in Jesus' own words, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37).

Therefore, holding to God's Word alone as our source and judge of Christian doctrine, followers of Christ reject as contrary to the Holy Scripture the teachings that God does not truly desire the salvation of all men; that He has predestined some to damnation; or that God's election is based upon some good work, merit or quality in men.

As to why some are saved and others are lost, we can only say with the Bible that God's elect are saved entirely by God's grace for Christ's sake, and that the lost are so entirely of their own fault, because they have not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18; cf. 12:48; Ephesians 2:8-10; Acts 7:51).

What can we know about the final judgment?

Again, when it comes to the last things and the final judgment, there is much confusion even among those professing to be Christians. Some would predict the day of Christ's return and others speak of a secret return and rapture of the saints before the final judgment. Again, followers of Christ Jesus look to His Word for the truth and reject those teachings which are contrary to the Bible.

In the book of Hebrews (9:26-28), we read of Christ Jesus: "Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

From God's Word, we see that – unless Christ returns first – each person will suffer temporal death; and after death comes God's judgment. We also hear again that Christ came into this world to go to the cross, sacrifice Himself in our stead and for our sin that He might return on the Last Day to receive us to Himself and grant us eternal salvation.

God's Word reveals to us that, at death, the souls of believers are taken to be with their Lord and Savior in heaven, and the souls of unbelievers begin suffering the eternal torments of hell.

Consider Jesus' words in Luke 16:19-31 (please take the time to read them). When the beggar died, he was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. When the rich man died and was buried, he was in torment in hell and asked his ancestral father Abraham to

have mercy on him and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue because he was tormented in hell's flame.

Note what Jesus said to the dying thief who repented and looked to Jesus for mercy: "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). The apostle Paul wrote to the believers at Philippi (Philippians 1:21-23): "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better."

In Revelation 14:13, we read: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

Of those who have died in unbelief, we read of their imprisonment when the crucified and risen Christ Jesus "went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water" (1 Peter 3:19-20). And the Bible also says: "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment ... the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Peter 2:4,9).

The Bible also teaches that, on the Last Day, Jesus Christ will return to judge the living and the dead; and on that Day, all the dead will be raised up.

Jesus said, "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have

done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29).

Job expressed his confidence: “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me” (Job 19:25-27; cf. Revelation 20:11-15; Acts 10:42; 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

The wicked and unbelieving will be cast, both body and soul, into the everlasting torments of hell; but those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation will, according to both body and soul, dwell with Christ forever, enjoying the blessings of heaven.

The Bible says: “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day” (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; cf. John 5:29; Matthew 10:28; Luke 16:23-24; Isaiah 66:24; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 John 3:2; John 3:36; 17:24; Revelation 20-21).

On that Day, those who trusted in the perfect atonement of Christ Jesus will not be condemned but receive everlasting life, as Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life,

and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life” (John 5:24).

Jesus also said: “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:1-3). The Bible also says of heaven: “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11).

Paul wrote to the believers in Thessalonica: “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Though many have, over the ages, attempted to determine the Day of Christ’s return and judgment of the living and the dead, the Bible teaches that the Day of Christ’s return is known only to God and not to man. Christians believe Jesus’ words: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but

my Father only” (Matthew 24:36; cf. v.29-42; Mark 13:32; 2 Peter 3:10).

Some would separate Christ’s return from the Day of Judgment, saying that Christ will secretly return and rapture away believers before a period of severe tribulation and an earthly millennial kingdom, however Jesus’ own word refute this lie of Satan.

Before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matthew 24:29-31).

The Word of God is clear. Notice that Jesus will come visibly – every eye will see Him (Revelation 1:7) – and with the sound of a trumpet and gather His elect from the four winds “after the tribulation of those days.” Note in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (quoted above) Jesus coming with the sound of the trumpet. Jesus’ coming for His elect marks the end of tribulation in this world and Jesus’ final judgment of the living and the dead.

In regard to the millennial reign of Christ in Revelation 20, read it carefully and you will note it is not on earth. Rather it is the reign of the souls of believers with their Savior in heaven until the Last Day when Christ returns and brings them with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:13ff.), the dead are raised up and judged, and all believers – those who have fallen asleep in Jesus and those who are alive and remain at His coming – will be forever with the Lord Jesus in the mansions of His Father’s House.

Therefore, true believers and students of God's inspired Word will reject as false all contrary doctrines, such as purgatory and limbo, a secret rapture, an earthly millennial kingdom and any attempts to predict the day or hour of Christ's return.

Who is the Son of Perdition and Antichrist?

Once again, views about the Son of Perdition and Antichrist are varied but there is only one right explanation and that is God's. Therefore, we again look to God's Word for the answer.

The apostle John says in his first epistle (1 John 2:18): "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." Thus, we are told by God's Word that there are many antichrists who oppose the true doctrine of Christ Jesus, but there is also one specific Antichrist who was to come.

Of the many antichrists, John writes (1 John 2:22): "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son."

John, later in his epistle, writes (4:1-3): "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that

spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”

Thus those who do not confess and teach that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah and Savior of the world, are antichrists. Those who deny that God the Son took on human flesh and blood – being born of the virgin Mary – fulfilled all righteousness in our stead and made full and complete atonement for the sins of all mankind by His innocent sufferings and death upon the cross – made certain to us by His glorious resurrection from the dead on the third day – are antichrists and are of the spirit of the Antichrist who was to come into the world.

The Antichrist and his coming are described in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, where we read: “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

The Scriptures teach that before Jesus comes back and all believers are gathered together to Him, there would be a falling away, or apostasy, within the visible Christian church in this world and the “man of sin,” “the son of perdition,” is revealed for what he is: the Antichrist.

The Bible teaches that the Antichrist would oppose and exalt himself above God and all that is worshiped as God and take his seat as God (or as God’s representative) in the temple (identified in the New Testament as the church), claiming to be God and to have and speak with divine authority. (Though space does not permit here, the rise and spiritual adultery of the Antichrist, as well as his persecution of true believers and final judgment, is vividly portrayed in Revelation, chapters 13, 17 and 18.)

This word of God was fulfilled when the bishop of Rome exalted himself and took his seat within the outward Christian church, claiming to be the vicar of Christ in this world and to speak with the infallible authority of God. The Roman popes not only exalted themselves in the church, but they opposed and even condemned the true and central doctrine of the Christian Faith – that of salvation by God’s grace alone for Christ’s sake alone and through faith alone in Christ Jesus and His atoning sacrifice upon the cross. In place of Christ’s doctrine, revealed in God’s Word, the popes taught and required people to believe their own man-made doctrines concerning good works, salvation through the Roman Church, the mass as an unbloody sacrifice for sins, purgatory, vows, indulgences, praying to saints and the like (cf. Galatians 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 4:1-3).

The Roman papacy was revealed as the very Antichrist through the preaching of God's Word during the Lutheran Reformation. His kingdom and power are consumed through the preaching of God's Word. And, the Antichrist will finally be destroyed at the brightness of Christ's second coming.

The Scriptures warn true believers to come out from the pope's false church, saying: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

Are Christians required to observe the Sabbath and other holy days?

Are we required, as Christians, to observe the Sabbath and other holy days? Some insist that we are required to rest on Saturdays, observe Jewish feast days and abstain from certain foods. But what does God say in His Word?

In Colossians 2:16-17, we read: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."

To the Christians at Rome, the apostle Paul wrote (Romans 14:5-6): "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God

thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.”

Jesus also, when faulted because His disciples, passing through the grain fields on the Sabbath Day, were picking heads of grain and eating the kernels, said: “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28).

Since Jesus Christ fulfilled the law in our stead and suffered and died for all our sins and rose again, we are complete in Him. In Him we have forgiveness for all our sins, acceptance of God, and everlasting life. Since the Old Covenant has been fulfilled by Christ for us and we are under the New Covenant in which we have forgiveness of sins and life everlasting through faith alone in Christ Jesus, we are no longer bound to the Old Covenant laws regarding foods, the Sabbath or other feast days.

Thus, if one chooses to observe the Sabbath and eat only certain foods, that is a matter of Christian liberty. If one chooses not to do so, that too is okay according to God’s own Word.

In fact, the Bible speaks of it as a weakness and lack of knowledge when one’s conscience condemns him over foods or the observance of certain days and times (cf. Romans 14:1ff.), but those who have knowledge are not to use their freedom to offend the weak.

And, in the case of those who insist that one must observe the Sabbath and other holy days to be a true Christian, be pleasing to God or to obtain eternal salvation, Paul’s words to the Galatians apply: “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:4); and, “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain” (Galatians 4:10-11).

A Simple Explanation of Christian Doctrine

Does this mean, we no longer teach all of God's commandments? Not at all! The commandment regarding the Sabbath Day does still require us to regularly set aside time to hear and learn God's Word and to worship Him. Indeed, this is one the primary reasons God commanded His people to rest from their labors on the Sabbath.

Consider the Word of God in Isaiah 58:13-14: "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."

The Bible still calls upon us to hear God's Word, consider His ways and to worship and glorify Him, and the Christians generally did so on the first day of each week (Exodus 20:8; Acts 2:42; Colossians 3:16; Psalm 119:15-16; 26:8; 111:1; 95:1-7; 96:1-3; John 20:1,19, 26; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

We are to "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16). We are to "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25). The early believers "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

It is for this reason, Christians yet today generally set aside Sundays and other special days for the hearing of God's Word and for our gathering together to worship the LORD our God. However, the observance of these certain days is a church practice carried out in Christian liberty rather than a divine command binding upon the conscience (Romans 14:5-6).

What is marriage and why do we hold it sacred?

Governments view marriage as a civil union involving rights and privileges which can also legally be dissolved or annulled. The civil union is related to legal issues involving children and child custody, property and financial responsibility, contracts and decision making. And governments are now granting marriage and its privileges and protections to same-sex couples and maybe soon to more than two individuals in polygamous relationships. But true marriage, though a civil institution for this world, is a much richer union than what most governments and people make of it in our day.

The Bible teaches that marriage is a lifelong union between one man and one woman, that marriage was instituted by God and is entered by mutual consent and promise.

God's design and institution of marriage is recorded in Genesis 2:18-25: "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what

he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”

God created the woman for the man and brought her to the man to be his wife. And, it is for that reason, a man, even yet today, leaves his father and mother and is joined with his wife to become a new family unit.

When questioned about the legitimacy of divorce, Jesus answered (Matthew 19:4-6): “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

Since Mary, who was betrothed to Joseph but had not yet come together with him, is called Joseph’s wife in Matthew 1:18-25, we see that marriage is entered by mutual consent and promise. Marriage is for this life only and does not continue into the life to come (cf. Romans 7:1-3; Luke 20:27-38; Deuteronomy 22:23-24).

God’s Word also teaches that it is sin to violate the marriage union by unfaithfulness, divorce or desertion.

Jesus said, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:6).

Jesus also said, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery” (Mark 10:11-12; cf. Matthew 5:31-32; 1 Corinthians 7:1-16; Exodus 20:14; Malachi 2:14-16).

The writer to the Hebrews says (Hebrews 13:4): “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.”

With Scripture, God’s children also condemn as sin to be repented of all lewdness and fornication (sexual acts and desires outside the bonds of Biblical marriage), including pornography, coarse sexual speaking or jesting, rape, sodomy, homosexuality, bestiality, transgenderism, etc. (Matthew 5:27-32; Leviticus 18:1-30; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20; Ephesians 5:3-8; Deuteronomy 22:5).

What does God say about the bearing of children?

In the eyes of many, having and raising children (and especially raising large families) is almost viewed as a curse and burden. Many would restrict the numbers of children a couple should be allowed to have. How different than the Biblical and Christian view toward bearing and raising children!

A Simple Explanation of Christian Doctrine

When God created Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, He “blessed them” and said to them, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28; cf. 9:1,7). God’s Word also teaches that children are a blessing of the LORD, and that the conception and formation of a child in the womb is the result of God’s creative working.

The Bible says: “Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3-5).

In the next psalm (Psalm 128), God’s Word says: “Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel.”

Therefore, even though the world may consider children a burden and a curse because they get in the way of selfish and sinful ambitions and goals, Christians view children as a blessing and gift of God to be desired.

And, even though people often attempt to control the numbers and timing of children born, God is ultimately in control. He gives conception and closes the womb, and He forms each child in the womb of his or her mother and gives life. Consider the examples of Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, Ruth and Hannah (cf. Genesis 25:21; 29:31; 30:22-23; Ruth 4:13; 1 Samuel 1:5,10-11,19-20; 2:21).

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The Bible teaches that the conception and formation of a child in its mother's womb is a creative work of God: "For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalm 139:13-16; cf. Ecclesiastes 11:5).

We also learn from the Bible that it is God's will and command for husbands and wives to seek and desire to have children (Genesis 1:28; 3:16; 9:1,7; 1 Timothy 2:15; 5:14). And, since the Scriptures clearly teach that human life begins at conception, when God begins forming the child in the womb, and that it is murder to kill or destroy the life of another human being, including an unborn child (Psalm 139:13-16; Ecclesiastes 11:5; Genesis 25:21-23; 9:5-6; Exodus 20:13), Christians condemn as sin abortion – in all its forms – and reject as contrary to God's will and intention the modern views and practices which would limit and discourage Christian parents from conceiving and bearing children.

Why do Christians regard all human life as sacred?

In an age of abortion and euthanasia, little regard is given to God as the creator and redeemer of human life; and people seem to feel they have the right to end life when life is no longer meaningful or convenient. Followers of Jesus Christ, however, consider the value of human life on the basis of what God teaches us in His Word.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1); and “...God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

The Bible teaches that every human life is a creation of God and that every human life is precious to God, for God created man in His own image (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7,21-22; Psalm 139:13-16).

And the Bible also teaches that Jesus Christ, God’s own dear Son, came into this world to redeem all human life. Jesus, when He died on the cross, “gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:6) and desires the salvation of all.

Therefore, except in the cases of punishing evildoers and waging just wars to protect life and property, God has reserved for Himself the right to end or destroy a human life (Genesis 9:5-6; Romans 13:1-4; 1 Peter 2:14; Exodus 20:13; Psalm 31:15; 39:4-5; 90:1-3; Job 14:1-12; Acts 17:24-28).

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Therefore, as followers of Jesus Christ, we condemn as murder and sin the practice of abortion, euthanasia, self-inflicted death (suicide) and all other unjustified taking of human life; and we do all in our power to protect and preserve God-given life until God, in His infinite wisdom, takes life away.

[Scripture quotations in this work are from the King James Version of the Bible]

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