

Here's What We Believe

Baptist Missionary
Association of America

E. Harold Henderson

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Preface

These Bible lessons are based on the Doctrinal Statement of the Baptist Missionary Association of America. This statement was adopted in 1989. All quotations accredited to the "Doctrinal Statement" are from this document. (Copies of the Doctrinal Statement are available from the Baptist Bible and Book House, 1319 Magnolia Street, Texarkana, Texas 75501, and other Christian bookstores and denominational agencies.)

All true doctrines come from the Bible. They have their origin in the Word of God. Neither individuals, churches, nor denominations have the right to formulate doctrine. Doctrine is what the Bible teaches; so doctrine originates with God. We must diligently search the Bible in order to understand the teachings of the heavenly Father. These lessons attempt to do that.

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1

The One True God

"There is one living and true God, the creator of the universe (Exodus 15:11; Isaiah 45:11; Jeremiah 27:5). He is revealed in the unity of the Godhead as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, who are equal in every divine perfection (Exodus 15:11; Matthew 28:19; II Corinthians 13:14)."
 —Doctrinal Statement

The belief in the existence of God is practically universal. Every culture, however primitive, has some concept of God. It is as if that truth is written in the conscience of the whole human race. Ideas of the nature of God vary, but the existence of God is accepted. The only person who denies the existence of God is one who rejects the evidence because of an evil heart which is set against the truth.

Knowledge of the one living and true God is the highest knowledge a person can ever attain. Coming to know God in truth changes a person; he can never be the same again. We Christians rejoice that we have a complete revelation of God through nature, the inspired Scriptures, and through Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This study is designed to help you better understand Him who is beyond understanding and to know Him whom to know aright is to have life eternal. Tread softly here; this is holy ground.

God

We believe there is one living and true God who is revealed in the unity of the Godhead as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. That statement of doctrine contains five great truths about the nature of our God.

God is one. The pagans have their many

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gods, but the Christian has but one. We agree with the Shema of ancient Israel, which reads, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4). "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" (I Corinthians 8:6). Our belief in the trinity of God does not make Him three Gods. He is one.

God is living. The idols and images before which people bow in worship are lifeless items of stone, wood, or metal. But our God is "the most High . . . that liveth for ever . . . from generation to generation" (Daniel 4:34). We speak of that as the eternity of God. When He would make a vow, He swears by himself (since there is no greater than He), saying, "As I live, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezekiel 14:16, 18, 20). As the living God, He swears by His life. Pause now and talk with Him who lives forever, your Lord and your God.

God is true. He is "a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deuteronomy 32:4). Because He is true He always speaks truth, does right, and receives those who seek Him in truth. Because He is true you can believe His promises and rely upon Him with safety.

God is Creator. The first announcement of the Bible is, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). We worship Him with these words, "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" (Nehemiah 9:6). Unbelievers deny that statement, claiming it to be unscientific. But "through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God" (Hebrews 11:3).

God is tri-unity. Here is one of the greatest mysteries of the doctrine of God. How can He be three persons and yet one God? We believe it, whether we can explain it or not. The doctrine was intimated in the Old Testament with the plural name for deity (*Elohim*) and the use of plural pronouns in reference to God ("us, our"). The doctrine is stated in the New Testament in the baptismal formula: "in the name (singular) of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). It is stated in the apostolic benediction (II Corinthians 13:14); and even Jesus indicated it by saying the Father would send the Spirit in response to the request of the Son (John 14:16). We believe that God the Father, Son, and Spirit are equally deity.

The living God touches every life personally.

God the Father—Eternal Deity
What is the scope of His fatherhood? It is not a "fatherhood of God

and brotherhood of man" which bypasses the doctrine of salvation. His fatherhood is manifest in three areas. (1) He is the Father of all people by creation, according to Malachi 2:10 and Deuteronomy 32:6. (2) He is the Father of the Son by eternal generation. Jesus was the Son of God in eternity before His birth to a human mother. (3) He is the Father of believers in Jesus by regeneration, according to John 1:11, 12; 3:5-7; Galatians 3:26. How do you claim His fatherhood over you?

What were the intimations of His fatherhood in the Old Testament? He is called "a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows" (Psalm 68:5). He is said to pity us as a father pities his own dear children (Psalm 103:13). God is pictured as the Father of national Israel (Jeremiah 31:9). But those were just dim glimpses of the New Testament revelation.

What is the revelation of His fatherhood in the New Testament? The Bible states quite clearly that God is the Father of Jesus, the son of Mary (Matthew 3:17; John 14—17). Jesus is called His "beloved Son" and Jesus calls Him "Father."

God is the Father of those who receive Jesus by faith. As a Father, He is concerned about our welfare (Matthew 6:25-34), hears our prayers (Matthew 6:5-15), disciplines us (Hebrews 12:5-11), comforts us (II Thessalonians 2:16), gives good things to us (Matthew 7:11; II Peter 1:3), and makes us His heirs (Romans 8:15-17; I Corinthians 2:9).

Do not think in physical terms when you speak of God as Father. God is spirit. We understand our fatherhood among people because it is a reflection of God's fatherhood over us. Pause at this point and thank God for being your Father in Christ.

God the Son—Deity Incarnate

Jesus Christ was human in every sense of the word. He was born by natural development and birth to a normal human mother. Only her conception was miraculous. He grew up in a normal human body, the same as every other person who lives on the earth. He grew, was tired, had to eat to sustain His life, was tempted, and was otherwise fully human. So we can speak of "the Man" (note the capital "M" because of His deity) and call Him the Son of man. He was fully human.

Jesus Christ was eternal Deity. He lived before He was born! He had a relationship with the Father "before the world was" (John 17:5). That was why His birth had to be by a miraculous conception instead of natural human generation. In personal testimony Jesus spoke of His being with the Father in eternity, coming down from the Father, doing the work of the Father while on earth, and returning to the Father in heaven. He draws all of that into focus by the words, "I and my Father are one" (John

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10:30). "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). But the crowning proof of the eternal deity of Jesus was His resurrection from death (Romans 1:14). He laid down His life, and He took it up again by His own power. Only God could do that.

Jesus Christ did the work of God during His earthly ministry. He revealed God as no other person ever had or could. "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

He atoned for sin by His own death (Romans 3:21-26). He freely gave His life as the payment for human sin. He died and was buried. Then He arose from death on the third day. By His death He paid the penalty for sin, and by His resurrection He broke the power of sin. We are reconciled to God because He died, and we are saved by God because He lives (Romans 5:10).

He ascended back to the Father in heaven where He sat down at the right hand of God. He continues His blessed ministry of intercession in that high place (Romans 8:34). One day He will return in glory to receive us to himself (Acts 1:11; I Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Pause now and worship the Son of God, Incarnate Deity.

God the Spirit—Deity Present

Jesus promised that when He returned to heaven He would request the Father to send the Holy Spirit. (Note the three persons of Holy Trinity in John 14:16.) That is just what happened according to the record of Acts 1 and 2. Jesus called the Holy Spirit "another" companion. That word another means "another of the same kind." Thus the Holy Spirit has the same nature of deity as does Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is not some vague, misty, ghostly apparition. He is a real person, a divine person. Personal pronouns ("he") are ascribed to Him. Personal actions (convict, lead, teach, speak) are ascribed to Him. Personal emotions (grief) are ascribed to Him. And those actions are things only God can do. The Holy Spirit is called "God" in Acts 5:4.

The Holy Spirit was active in creation. He convicts of sin. He confers spiritual gifts. He performs the new birth in one who repents and trusts Jesus. He inspires Holy Scripture and illuminates the mind to understand it. He anoints and empowers for service. He sanctifies, comforts, fills, and produces spiritual fruit. He does the work only God can do.

The Holy Spirit is Deity. Your relation and reaction to Him is your relation and reaction to God. Do not ignore Him or resist His leadings. He is God—God living in you now.

How can the human mind express adequately the person and nature of Him whom we call God? This writer feels the discussion above is far too

weak to speak of our Father, His eternal Son, and the blessed Holy Spirit. God is far more majestic than I have been able to express.

It is of utmost importance that we recognize the majesty of God. A loss of awe in His presence causes us to lose our spirit of worship and the ability to fellowship with Him in our meditation. A thousand evils enter our lives when we are no longer sensing the holy ground of His presence.

No people ever rises above its religion, and no religion is ever higher than its concept of God. More important than the buildings, programs, goals, and accomplishments of a church is her concept of God.

What comes to your mind when you think about God? The answer to that question indicates what sort of person you are and the direction your life is taking. More than correct theology is involved here. Practical Christian living flows from our concept of God.

When a person sees himself in the presence of the sovereign God, he recognizes his faults and need for forgiveness. When a believer enters a personal relationship with God, all of life takes on a new dimension; he is a new creature. May God use this study to purify and elevate your concept of God. And may that concept influence your life so that you pass it on to your children. God is not like us. But He has made it possible for us to become like Him through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Pause here and worship Him who is so worthy of worship.

1. Why is the belief in God universal?
2. How is knowledge of God the highest knowledge possible?
3. What do we mean by saying that God is one?
4. What is the importance of the fact that He is a living God?
5. Why is the doctrine of the Trinity so important?
6. How is God pictured as a Father in the Old Testament?
7. How is God pictured as a Father in the New Testament?
8. Why do we call Jesus "Deity Incarnate"?
9. How do you know that the Holy Spirit is God?
10. Why is a correct doctrine of God so essential to your life?

2

God's Inerrant Revelation

"The Scriptures are God's inerrant revelation, complete in the Old and New Testaments, written by divinely inspired men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:21). Those men wrote not in words of human wisdom but in words taught by the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 2:13)."

"The Scriptures provide the standard for the believer's faith and practice (II Timothy 3:16, 17), reveal the principles by which God will judge all (Hebrews 4:12; John 12:48), and express the true basis of Christian fellowship (Galatians 1:8, 9; II John 9-11)."

—Doctrinal Statement

Do we really believe that the Bible is God's words in human language, without error in its content, but true word by word? We answer with a positive "YES!" Such a belief requires us to be "people of the Book." Since the Bible is the book of God and we are the people of God, the Bible is the most important book in the world to us.

There are many people today, some even in the Christian community, who question or deny that the Bible is an absolutely true revelation from God. But their denials do not change our conviction. We have met God in the Word. We have His testimony concerning the Word. We say, "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4). God has said that the Bible is His revelation and that it has no error. We accept that as true.

The Bible Is Revelation
It is the record of God's disclosure, not of man's discovery. To reveal means to unveil, to make plain, to draw back the curtain. God drew back the curtain and made plain to human writers divine truth which they wrote as Sacred Scripture. First Corinthians 2:9-16 teaches four things about that disclosure.

1. The unseen things of God cannot be understood by natural man. Man in his natural state can never see, hear with understanding, or conceive in his human mind the things of God. No one can know the mind of the Lord

or search out the judgments based on God's wisdom and knowledge, because His ways are past our finding out (Romans 11:33).

2. The unseen things of God have been revealed to chosen men. To read "God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit" is to witness a miracle of grace (I Corinthians 2:10). He chose what to reveal, when to reveal it, and to whom to reveal it. Thus our Bible came over a period of about fifteen hundred years, written by scores of different persons. Yet the message is always consistent because the one God spoke through each writer.

3. The unseen things of God have been given through Spirit-taught words: "not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth" (I Corinthians 2:13). That means the very words of the Bible are God's words. Finite humans wrote the words, but only as "they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1:21). The Bible is God's words expressed in human language.

4. The Spirit-taught words are understood only by spiritually minded believers in Jesus (I Corinthians 2:14-16). That explains why there are so many opinions about the Bible and so many interpretations of its text. The Holy Spirit joins spiritual truth to spiritual minds, but to no other. Ask yourself, "How well do I understand the Bible?" That will tell you something about the quality of your spiritual mind.

It is God's disclosure of what was formerly unknown. The New Testament, particularly Paul's epistles, makes reference to a "mystery." It does not refer to something which is so difficult to comprehend that very few people know of it. It refers instead to something formerly unknown but now revealed in Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:26, 27; Ephesians 3:3, 4, 9). In a sense we could say that all of the Bible truth was formerly unknown by carnal people but is now made known in the Holy Bible.

It is God's disclosure by a special revelation. God has revealed himself in nature (Psalm 19:1), in visions (Genesis 15:1), in providence (Isaiah 46:4), and especially in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1, 2; John 1:14, 18). All of those revelations are recorded in the Bible. At this point we are concerned with the truth revealed. In a section below we will consider how that revealed truth was recorded without error.

It is God's disclosure which is preserved for all generations. What happened centuries before was written in the Bible for our instruction (I Corinthians 10:11). Since the Word of God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8), all generations of mankind will have a witness to the truth from God himself.

The Bible is the divinely revealed Word of God.

The Bible is the supreme authority for faith and practice.

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The Bible Is Inerrant

We believe the Bible is without error. It has no mistakes in any subject to which it makes reference. It is historically accurate in every statement. It is the standard of truth by which all other opinions are to be measured. We use two theological terms to describe that doctrine. First, we say the Bible is *inerrant*. That means it is without error, making no mistake. Second, we say the Bible is *infallible*. That means it is incapable of error and never wrong.

How can such a statement be made about books written by finite humans in such differing situations over so many centuries? It can be said because God directed the writers of Holy Scripture so that they wrote without error what God revealed to them. Each used his own vocabulary and reflected his own personality, but what was written was the Word of God, not the words of men. That is the miracle of the Bible.

There is no error in the Bible. Its references to history, science, psychology, astrology, geology, sociology, religion, or any other subject continue to be true today. It is the inerrant Word of God. What a Book!

The Bible declares itself to be the inspired and inerrant Word of God. It declares that "his work is perfect" (Deuteronomy 32:4). He "keepeth truth for ever" (Psalm 146:6). "Every word of God is pure . . . Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:5, 6). It will not change or pass away, for it is eternal truth (Matthew 5:18). Psalm 19:7-9 describes it as "perfect," "sure," "right," "pure," "clean," "true and righteous altogether."

Study the Bible. There is no other book like it in all the world.

The Bible Is Complete

It is God's final revelation until Jesus returns in person. Nothing was left out; hence, nothing needs to be added. Not one unnecessary word was included, so nothing needs to be taken out. The Word of God is so complete that God pronounces a most severe judgment upon one who would add to or take from the book (Revelation 22:18, 19).

God's revelation is recorded in the sixty-six books of the Holy Bible. It is understood today by illumination, in which the Holy Spirit opens one's mind to the meaning and application of the truth revealed and recorded in the Bible. We need no "new" revelation to know the truth of God. God is not giving new revelation today. The Holy Spirit, who is the real author of the Bible, is present with each believer in Jesus to interpret the Bible to him.

We have a responsibility to know the Word and to obey the Word. But we have no authority to try to correct it or improve upon it. Here is God's word to us: "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou

shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deuteronomy 12:32).

There have been some who claim to have received later revelations which add to God's revelations in the Bible. (I refer to books like *The Book of Mormon* and *Science and Health With a Key to the Scriptures*, held sacred by Mormons and Christian Scientists.) But all such revelations fall far short of God's word in the Bible and are to be rejected (Isaiah 8:20). The Bible is complete in its sixty-six books.

The Bible Is Inspired

A revelation has to do with God giving the truth to human minds; inspiration has to do with the recording of that truth in human language. Inspiration is the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon chosen people, with the result that their writing is the Word of God rather than their own ideas or opinions.

Second Timothy 3:16 declares inspiration for the whole Bible: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (II Timothy 3:16). Sections of law, history, poetry, prophecy, biography, and epistles are equally and totally inspired. You can read at any place in the Bible and be assured that it is the Word of God.

The theories of inspiration are many. (1) *Natural inspiration* holds that the writers were simply great men of literary genius. (2) *Dictation inspiration* sees the writers as passive instruments through which God wrote. (3) *Partial inspiration* sees some parts of the Bible inspired and other parts uninspired. (4) *Plenary/verbal inspiration* views the very words of the Bible as God's words so there is unerring accuracy in every statement, even in every word. The writers used the exact words which God approved for them to use (Exodus 4:12; I Corinthians 2:13).

The Bible Is the Standard

It is the standard for doctrine. We follow the principle of Isaiah 8:20 in estimating all religious teaching: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." All other books of religion and all religious doctrine are to be judged by the teaching of the Bible. What agrees with the Bible is true, and what disagrees is untrue. The Bible is the standard for doctrine.

It is the standard for conduct. It is by hiding God's Word in the heart (memorizing the Bible) that you can be kept from sin (Psalm 119:11). This book will instruct, reprove, correct, and keep you in the way of righteousness (II Timothy 3:16, 17).

It is the standard for adjudication, the principle by which God will judge. Jesus said the words He spoke would judge people at the last

day (John 12:47, 48). We must learn to live by it now, for we shall be judged by its standards then.

It is the standard for fellowship, "the true basis for Christian fellowship." We can have free fellowship with any who live by this Book. But we must not extend Christian fellowship to those who rebel against it (Romans 16:17; I Timothy 6:3-5; II Timothy 3:2-5). Do you test your friends by the Word of God?

This book contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be saved, and practice it to be holy. It will reward the greatest labor and condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents. It is the book of books—God's Book—the revelation of God to man.

1. In what way is the Bible God's word in man's language?
2. How is the Bible a record of God's revelation?
3. In what way is the Bible written in Spirit-taught words?
4. What do we mean by saying that the Bible is *inerrant*?
5. What passages declare the Bible to be without error?
6. Why is it important to say that the Bible is complete in sixty-six books?
7. Why do we need illumination rather than revelation today?
8. What does it mean to say that the Bible is *inspired*?
9. Why should we accept the Bible as our standard for life?
10. How can you give the Bible a larger place in your time?



The Personality of Satan

"Satan is a person rather than a personification of evil (John 8:44), and he with his demons opposes all that is true and godly by blinding the world to the gospel (II Corinthians 4:3, 4), tempting saints to do evil (Ephesians 6:11; I Peter 5:8), and warring against the Son of God (Genesis 3:15; Revelation 20:1-10)."

— *Doctrinal Statement*

What do you believe about the devil? What a person believes about Satan will influence his life-style, just as what he believes about God will do so. The doctrine of the devil and his demons (called "devils" in the King James Version of the Bible) is a very biblical doctrine. It is important that we understand that teaching.

An understanding of the doctrine of Satan is not just for an intellectual exercise or to satisfy curiosity. We must not become enamored with the doctrine, but we must be informed about it. Unless we know our spiritual enemy, we will not be strong in the spiritual warfare. That is why this study is scheduled in a review of Bible doctrine. It has a very practical application to daily life.

The Evil Person

Is the devil really a person? A definite answer is possible only from the Bible. Satan deceives people concerning his very existence, and apart from the Bible each is left to his personal opinion. What does the Bible say about Satan?

The devil is referred to in seven different books of the Old Testament and in every book of the New Testament. That would be inexplicable if he were not a person with whom we had to be concerned.

Jesus spoke of the devil as a person. He said that Satan is a liar and a murderer. He said

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Satan binds people with physical infirmity. He said Satan sows tares (weeds) where good wheat has been sown to confuse the harvest. He said Satan has a kingdom. That sounds like Jesus thought of Satan as a person.

Jesus spoke to the devil. In His temptation experience in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11), Jesus spoke to Satan three times, quoting a passage from the Bible each time. Jesus was not deceived, neither was He play-acting. He knew that the devil is a real person, and He treated him that way.

The saints of God have experiences which indicate that the devil is a real person as they face him in temptation and spiritual warfare. Unbelievers might not recognize Satan's work, but he puts a lie in their heart and leads them in sin. Yes, Satan is real. Those who deny his reality are deceived.

Satan is an evil person who opposes truth.

Yes, Satan is real.

What is Satan like? That Satan has personality is proven by his possessing a mind which plans his devices (II Corinthians 11:3), emotions by which he can have a great wrath (Revelation 12:17), and a will by which he plans and performs (II Timothy 2:26). He is morally responsible for his actions (Matthew 24:51).

Satan is a creature, not an eternally existent being. The Bible does not tell of his origin except perhaps in Ezekiel 28:14, 15 where the description goes far beyond any earthly king. Everything is created but God; He is the Creator: "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" (Colossians 1:16). That includes the devil himself.

Satan is a spirit being, belonging to an order of angels. The fact that Michael, the archangel, did not dare to rebuke Satan when disputing over the body of Moses indicates that Satan may have been the highest of the angels before his fall (Jude 8, 9). He still is ruler over the dominion of fallen angels and demon spirits.

Satan is the enemy of God and His people. He is called slanderer, adversary, accuser of the brethren, enemy, tempter, wicked one, destroyer, sower of discord, and other degrading names which indicate his evil spirit toward all that is good. He is your personal enemy, even if you are not aware of it.

Satan is the wicked one. He can be no other. A person who yields to Satan's influence will be wicked also. Beware!

What is Satan's position and power today? He is called the prince of this world (John 12:31), the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2), the god of this age (II Corinthians 4:4). He is strong enough to resist

and delay the archangel of God in his mission (Daniel 10:5-13), and is the ruler of the unsaved (Acts 26:18; I John 5:19). It is serious to stand against the devil. We must have the help of our Lord.

His Evil Work

The consuming desire of Satan is to thwart the plan of God in every area and by every means. Note the Bible record of how he has attempted that evil work.

He tempted Christ to sin (Matthew 4:1-11). I can understand his tempting us, but what audacity he showed in tempting the very Son of God! He offered to Jesus a demonic version of the benefits of the atonement without the suffering of the cross. Jesus turned aside from it. That temptation was repeated in various ways several times after the wilderness temptation (Matthew 16:23; John 8:44; 13:27).

He tempts the nations of mankind. His great purpose is to deceive the nations into believing that they can prosper well without God or in opposition to God. He has been quite successful in that attempt, as our present culture indicates. Even after one thousand years of great peace and prosperity, the nations will listen to his lies and align themselves against God (Revelation 20:8). How tragic it is that people will believe the devil's lies!

He blinds the minds of unbelievers. He does not want them to understand and respond to the gospel. When one hears the message of salvation, Satan comes immediately to take it away as the birds eat grain which falls upon the pathway.

He tempts believers to sin, accuses and slanders them, employs demons to try to defeat them, and incites persecution against them. He opposes them because he opposes God, and they belong to God by faith in Jesus Christ.

However, Satan can be faced and defeated. If believers in Jesus are sober and watchful, give no place to the devil, resist him after putting on the whole armor of God, are informed of his devices, walk in the Spirit, and use the Word of God, they can overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and the Word of their testimony. No Christian can truly say, "The devil made me do it." He can overcome the devil because "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (I John 4:4).

His Evil End

Satan will not be victorious in his war against God's people. Four great defenses of the Christian assure that he will not be defeated. First, no one can condemn the believer for whom Christ is making con-

tinual intercession before the Father (Roman 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). Rejoice, O Christian!

Second, no demonic power can overcome one who is strong in the Lord and in the power of His might from having put on the whole armor of God. He can stand against all the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:11-16).

Third, Satan was defeated through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The cross was his Waterloo (John 12:31).

Fourth, the Christian has the strength of the Lord to resist the devil so that Satan flees from him (I Peter 5:9; James 4:7). When the battle is over, the Christian is still standing (Ephesians 6:11-13). Christian, claim your victory!

Satan is under the perpetual judgment of God. He was judged when he was barred from his original position in heaven (Ezekiel 28:16). He was judged in the Garden of Eden when he deceived the woman (Genesis 3:14, 15). He was judged at the cross of Jesus, whose death effected redemption for those who were enslaved to the devil (John 12:31). He was judged when he was cast out of heaven and barred from access (Revelation 12:13). He will be judged when he is cast into the abyss to be confined for one thousand years (Revelation 20:2). He will be judged when he is cast into the lake of fire and kept there in eternal punishment (Revelation 20:10).

The devil may appear to have a temporary victory in our world. But take the longer view and see him as your defeated foe.

Do not take the devil too lightly, for he is a fierce and determined foe. Do not take him too seriously, for he is a defeated foe through Jesus Christ. He is powerful and active now as ruler over an innumerable host of demon spirits, but his doom is certain and sealed.

"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (I John 4:4). Glory!

1. Why do we need to understand the Bible doctrine of Satan?
2. What is the significance of Satan being a person?
3. How do you know Satan is a person?
4. What is Satan like?

4

The Depravity of Mankind

Mankind is not as bad as it can be, but is as bad off as it can be.

That is a summary of the doctrine of "total depravity." Baptists are the only major denomination of Christianity which holds to a biblical doctrine of the total depravity of the human race. That doctrine magnifies the grace of God in the salvation of sinners.

Our salvation is based solely on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and is available by God's free grace without any merit whatever on our part. We only receive by faith what God freely gives by grace. There is no merit in the sinner which would recommend him to God.

The Meaning of Depravity

Many people reject the doctrine of depravity because they misunderstand what it means. It does not mean that every one is as wicked as he can be, will indulge in every sin, cannot value good or do good things, has no conscience or sense of moral values, or that an infant is born a sinner who is already condemned to hell. No!

The doctrine means that the entire nature of every person is weakened and warped toward sin so that each one will sin upon coming to the age of spiritual responsibility. It means that there is no desire in a person to come to God and no merit to claim when he responds to God's call.

The Bible is very clear in teaching these doc-

"Although man was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26; 2:17), he fell through sin and that image was marred (Romans 5:12; James 3:9). In his unregenerate state, he is void of spiritual life, is under the influence of the devil, and lacks any power to save himself (Ephesians 1:1-3; John 1:13). The sin nature has been transmitted to every member of the human race, the man Jesus Christ alone being excepted (Romans 3:23; I Peter 2:22). Because of the sin nature, man possesses no divine life and is essentially and unchangeably depraved apart from divine grace (Romans 3:10-19; Jeremiah 17:9)."

—Doctrinal Statement

trines which underlie the doctrine of depravity. (1) All people are sinners before God in their natural state. (2) That universal sinful condition is related to Adam's rebellion which brought the fall of the human race. (3) The whole human race is condemned apart from saving grace. (4) Unregenerate persons are children of the devil, not children of God. (5) The whole human race is in helpless captivity to the enslaving power of sin. That means every person is warped and weakened toward sin. Each one will decide against God when making intelligent choices at the age of accountability. No one is righteous apart from Jesus Christ.

All people are as hopeless as they can be without Christ.

The Condition Before Depravity

The human condition of separation from and enmity toward God did not exist from the beginning of the human race. Both man and woman were created by the direct work of God (Genesis 1:26, 27). They were made in the "image and likeness" of God. Since God is free from sin (cannot even be tempted to sin), they were free from sin also. There is no biblical information about how long Adam and Eve lived in the beautiful Garden of Eden before sin entered human experience. They could have lived forever if they had refrained from sin.

What is the "image and likeness" of God which our first ancestors bore? It was not a physical likeness. (Nowhere does the Bible say God is six feet tall with brown hair!) God is spirit, and has no single physical form. Neither was the image and likeness of God the power of rule over the created earth. Humans bear this image in the sense that they are threefold beings (with a spirit, soul and body, as God is a tri-unity) with the power to discern good and evil (as God distinguishes good and evil) and the ability to choose the good and reject the evil. They also are immortal, passing through death to life beyond, as God is eternal.

Humans were free from depravity until they chose to sin. That sin brought the "fall" of the human race into total depravity.

The Fall Into Depravity

God set the man and woman whom He had created over all the earth. They had authority over animals, birds, and even the earth itself. They were God's special representatives who lived among and governed the lesser creatures.

But Satan entered the picture. He tempted the woman to go beyond God's permissive will. She surrendered her power of dominion when she

yielded to the serpent's enticing lies and led her husband into sin with her (Genesis 3).

Up to that time the man and woman had been unclothed in the presence of each other without embarrassment. But when they sinned, they felt shame at being unclothed and sought to fashion garments from leaves to cover their nakedness. What had changed? They had. Suddenly each began having impure thoughts and attributed them to the other.

God knew it would be merciless to let the man and woman live forever in that condition. He did two things. (1) He decreed physical death for them to get them out of depraved bodies. (2) He announced the coming of a Savior to rescue them from spiritual death which came because of their sin.

But what happened to the first humans passed on to all of their descendants, just as the genes pass on physical characteristics. Since the parents were fallen and depraved, so all of their descendants are fallen also. That is why every person must be saved in order to have life and peace with God.

The Condition of Depravity

The natural man (as he is by nature apart from God) is void of spiritual life. He is dead in sin—separated from God because of his sin. When he is saved, he is raised out of spiritual death into spiritual life in Christ (Ephesians 2:1).

The natural man is enslaved to Satan. The whole world of mankind, which includes every living person, is under the power of the wicked one (1 John 5:19). When a person commits the first sin, he becomes a bondsman to sin (Romans 6:16). That is why the Bible speaks of salvation as redemption from bondage.

The natural man is powerless to save himself. Dead in sin and enslaved by sin, how can he deliver himself from sin? All he is, does, or desires is defiled. Even his righteousnesses are as filthy rags before God (Isaiah 64:6). He must have a Savior who has the power to save him.

The natural man is corrupted in every part. His spirit is darkened, his soul is debased, his body is death-ridden, his will is weakened, and his conscience is dulled. He has a mind of the "flesh" and a heart that is deceitful. He is spiritually dead, under wrath and judgment, utterly lost, a guilty sinner before God, and a child of the devil. He is to be pitied and directed to the Savior.

The Extent of Depravity

Depravity is universal in the created universe. (1) It is universal in the human race. Every person is born with a depraved nature. And every part

of the human nature (mind, emotion, will, spirit, and body) is depraved. That is true of you, me, and every other person. Even the best person suffers the same spiritual malady. (2) It is universal in the created earth. The inanimate creation is subject to the curse of human sin and is waiting to be delivered from it by Jesus (Romans 8:19-21). That deliverance will come when the present earth passes away and the new heavens and earth are made (II Peter 3). Everything and every person suffers the curse of depravity because of sin.

The Remedy for Depravity

There is one exception to the depravity of the human race—Jesus of Nazareth, whom we know as the Christ of God and our personal Savior. He "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (I Peter 2:22). He is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26). Because He is sinless He has offered the perfect sacrifice for sin. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him" (Hebrews 7:25).

Paul's treatment of depravity in Romans 5:12-21 can be summarized in one statement: "As the one act of Adam brought sin and death upon all, so the act of Jesus brought forgiveness and life to all." "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Knowing the truth of it, enter into the good of it today.

5

Saved by God's Grace

"Salvation is the gracious work of God whereby He delivers undeserving sinners from sin and its results (Matthew 1:21; Ephesians 2:8, 9). In justification He declares righteous all who put faith in Christ as Savior (Romans 3:20-22), giving them freedom from condemnation, peace with God, and full assurance of future glorification (Romans 3:24-26)."

"Salvation is based wholly on the grace of God apart from works (Titus 3:5; Ephesians 2:9). Anyone who will exercise repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved"

What do we mean when we speak of being "saved"? To be *saved* means "to be rescued or preserved from harm or danger; to make or keep safe." We might say the firemen "saved" an infant from a burning house" and mean that they rescued the child from harm or danger. We might say the seatbelt in a car "saved" the passenger from critical injury" and mean that it kept the passenger from serious injury.

In the religious realm, to be *saved* means "to be rescued or preserved from harm or danger; to make or keep safe," just as it means in the secular realm. However, it has the added meaning that the harm or danger from which one is rescued or preserved is the penalty of death and eternal judgment which comes upon impenitent sinners.

Saved is a great Bible word. It is used in the King James Version of the Bible more than 180 times, with the meaning "to rescue or preserve." That does not include the usage with the meaning "except," as in "*who is a rock save our God?*" (Psalm 18:31). More than three dozen times God is called our "*Saviour*." The theme of salvation binds all the Bible together, both the Old and the New Testaments.

There are two concepts of the way of salvation. (1) Some hold that we are saved by our deeds of merit plus an addition of the grace of God. (2) Others say we are saved by God's free grace, totally apart from human merit. Let us

(Acts 16:30-32; Luke 24:47; Romans 10:17)."

"Christ died for the sins of the whole world (John 1:29; 3:16; I John 2:1, 2). Through His blood, atonement is made without respect of persons (I Timothy 2:4-6). All sinners can be saved by this gracious provision (Hebrews 2:9; John 3:18)."

"God's sovereignty and man's freedom are two inseparable factors in the salvation experience (Ephesians 2:4-6). The two Bible truths are in no way contradictory, but they are amazingly complementary in the great salvation so freely provided. God, in His sovereignty, purposed, planned, and executed salvation in eternity while man's freedom enables him to make a personal choice in time, either to receive this salvation and be saved, or to reject it and be damned (Ephesians 1:9-14; John 1:12, 13)."

—Doctrinal Statement

review Bible teaching to see which is the truth.

The Meaning of Salvation

The Bible stresses six truths which explain what salvation is. Let's review them.

Salvation is the work of God.

Jonah learned that in the belly of the great fish and cried out, "Salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9). Isaiah testified, "God

Salvation is by grace through faith.

is my salvation" because "he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 12:2; 61:10). Notice that it is God who did the clothing and the covering, not man who clothed himself. The righteousness which is received in Christ is His own perfect righteousness, not our own. Salvation is a personal transaction with God. It is His gift of grace.

Salvation is the deliverance of sinners from sin and its penalty. The announcement of Jesus' birth included the prophecy of His ministry: "He shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). If we say salvation is the rescue or protection from harm or danger, we must ask what harm or danger threatens us. It is the danger of eternal death and eternal hell. Our sins so blind us that we can never find our way to God. He came in the person of Jesus to seek out we who were lost (Luke 19:10). "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (I Timothy 1:15). Aren't you glad He did?

Salvation is declaring and making righteous the person who believes in Jesus. To be righteous means to have a right standing before God, to be accepted by Him in peace. Romans 3:20-22 teaches that man can never attain that right standing before God by his own works. By faith in Jesus Christ, the believer

receives the righteousness of God himself. Think about that! On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, how righteous are you? You are a 10, because you have the perfect righteousness of God himself imputed to you. Glory! God makes you right with himself and announces it to your heart.

Salvation is freeing the sinner from condemnation. He who does not trust Jesus is already condemned (John 3:18). He who does trust Jesus is delivered from condemnation and stands free before God (Romans 8:1). God's forgiveness removes the guilt of sin; and when guilt is gone, the penalty is removed also.

Salvation is establishing peace with God. Justified by faith, each believer has peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:14). Through the blood of His cross, Jesus gave us peace with God and with those who trust Him as do we (Colossians 1:20). God becomes our loving Father, and we are His dear children. No wonder we have peace.

Salvation is assurance of future glory. The chain of God's saving purpose has five links: foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification (Romans 8:28-30). Note that the divine purpose reaches from eternity before time (foreknowledge) to eternity beyond time (glorification). Our presence with Him in glory is as certain as our present certainty of forgiveness of sin. When God saves, He saves eternally.

There are many other blessings which accompany salvation. But those six principles are sufficient for our understanding and our joy in being saved by grace.

The Way of Salvation

Salvation is received by faith. Even a casual reading of Jesus' words to Nicodemus (John 3:14, 15, 18, 36) leaves no doubt that "by grace are ye saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). It is by believing that we have eternal life (John 20:31).

Salvation is totally apart from any works of merit. It is "not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:9). Settle it once for all in your mind that salvation is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). That is why salvation is said to be a free gift of grace; it is not merited by our works.

Salvation is by repentance of sin. To repent means to turn from sin to God. God promised, "If the wicked will turn from all his sins . . . he shall surely live, he shall not die" (Ezekiel 18:21). When the wicked forsakes his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, God will have mercy upon him (Isaiah 55:7). There can be no turning to God if there is no turning from sin. Hence, repentance is necessary to salvation.

Salvation is by faith in Jesus. The Bible speaks of our "being justified by faith" (Romans 5:1). That was the way Abraham was saved (Galatians 3:6). That was the way Paul told the Philippian jailer to be saved (Acts 16:30-32). And that is the way you must be saved.

But what is faith? Faith is more than accepting doctrines. It is personal confidence (to the point of trust) in a person. Faith might be defined by using its spelling as an acrostic to read, "**F**orsaking **A**ll **I** Trust **H**im." That is saving faith—transferring all confidence from every other person or thing and setting it upon Jesus alone.

The Provision of Salvation

Salvation is by the death of Jesus. He is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). God established the law that sin brings death, so the forgiveness of sin must rest upon the death of an innocent sacrifice. Jesus' sacrifice was like that of "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Peter 1:19). He died for our sins, "and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:2). Salvation is free to us today because He paid the debt for our sins by His own death. He died for us (in our place and for our good). We believe in a vicarious, substitutionary atonement.

Salvation is without respect of persons. When we say Jesus died for "the whole world," or that He "gave himself a ransom for all," or that He tasted death "for every person" by the grace of God, we speak in literal and specific terms. He died for all so that the invitation "whosoever will" could be given to the whole human race. You will never share the gospel with a person for whom Jesus did not die. "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death . . . ; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9). That includes you. Rejoice!

The Problem of Salvation

In the salvation of sinners, God's sovereignty and man's freedom to choose seem to collide. How can God decree the salvation of sinners and still leave them free to choose whether or not to be saved? Both principles are taught in the Bible.

Salvation is provided by divine sovereignty. God decreed in eternity before time that He would save sinners by the sacrifice of His only begotten Son and chose us in Him before the world was created or a human being ever existed (Ephesians 1:3-6). His purpose and grace were given to us in Christ Jesus before the world began (II Timothy 1:9). It was not the capricious choice of blind fate, but in the light of His perfect knowledge of all things past, present, and future He chose us (I Peter 1:2).

The five links in God's sovereign work of salvation are foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification (Romans 8:29, 30). That means salvation is of the Lord from beginning to end and all the way between those two. The sovereign God saves sovereignly.

Salvation is received by a free act of the will. That "whosoever will" invitation is sincere. Anyone who will can come to Christ and be saved. He is not blocked from salvation by any decree of God or man. God's invitation is that all the people in all parts of the earth should look to Him and be saved (Isaiah 45:22). He tells how He invited sinners and they refused His invitation by the act of their own will (Isaiah 30:15; Romans 10:21). Jesus said to sinners of His day, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). The problem was not that they could not come, but that they would not come. God is a loving Father "who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (I Timothy 2:4). God wants you to be saved. He receives anyone who will come to Him.

God promises, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). But to whom does that promise apply? "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 2:39). Believe it. Call upon Him. Receive salvation. And rejoice!

1. What does it mean to be saved?
2. Why do we say that "salvation is of the Lord"?
3. How is the believer made righteous in salvation?
4. What does Roman 8:28-30 say about your salvation?
5. Why do we say that "salvation is by faith"?
6. How does a person repent of his sins?
7. How is Jesus' death related to your salvation?
8. For whom did Christ die?
9. How is God sovereign in saving sinners?
10. How is man free in receiving or rejecting salvation?

6

Set Apart for God

"All believers are set apart unto God (Hebrews 10:12-14) at the time of their regeneration (I Corinthians 6:11). They should grow in grace (II Peter 1:5-8) by allowing the Holy Spirit to apply God's Word to their lives (I Peter 2:2), conforming them to the principles of divine righteousness (Romans 12:1, 2; I Thessalonians 4:3-7) and making them partakers of the holiness of God (II Corinthians 7:1; I Peter 1:15, 16)."
—Doctrinal Statement

Sanctification! What a blessed Bible doctrine. But how tragically it has been neglected by many Baptists. The truth is that each believer in Jesus Christ has been sanctified (set apart to God), and that is what makes each one a saint. What doctrine of the Christian life is more wonderful than that?

Sanctification means "to separate for a holy use." The term is applied to both persons and things in biblical usage. All the firstborn of man and beast, for instance, were set apart for God after the death of the firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 13:2; Numbers 8:17).

We are concerned with sanctification as it applies to the people of God. An excellent summary statement may be found in Leviticus 20:26: "Ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine." To be severed from other people makes one sanctified to the Lord.

There are two elements in sanctification: position and practice. Positional sanctification occurs when God saves one and sets him apart for himself as His own dear child. Practical sanctification continues in the Christian as he grows in Christ's likeness and lives for His glory.

The Bible speaks of both positional sanctification and practical sanctification.

Positional Sanctification: What You Are in Christ

What is positional sanctification? It is the place, the position, you have because God has set you apart for His own. One who has been sanctified has been "perfected for ever" (Hebrews 10:14) because God has placed him "in Christ." He is separated from things unclean before God. His body has become the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19). He does not belong to himself but to God. His very body is a limb of Christ (I Corinthians 6:15). In his position, he is sanctified. His challenge is to make his life-style match his placing.

All believers are set apart unto God.

To whom are believers in Christ set apart? They are set apart to God. The Spirit of God sanctifies their bodies and the bodies are to so express their redeemed spirits that they glorify God in both body and spirit (I Corinthians 6:19, 20). The members of the body (hands, eyes, ears, etc.) are never to be used in the service of sin but always to be used in the work of righteousness. They are uniquely, personally, and eternally His.

When are believers in Christ set apart to God? They are sanctified the moment of their conversion. That is when they are born again (John 3), raised from death to life (Ephesians 2:1), translated from darkness to light (Colossians 1:13), transferred from death to life (John 5:24), and washed in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17), and justified, sanctified, and washed (I Corinthians 6:11). The Bible speaks of the "seal" of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). That seal is a brand, as the rancher brands his cattle. The "brand" which the Christian wears, and which identifies him as belonging to Christ, is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. He indwells only believers, and yet He indwells every believer. That sanctifies each believer for God.

Practical Salvation: How You Behave in Christ

Practical sanctification is the application to daily conduct the fact that you have been set apart for God. It continues through all of your life. You come to behave more and more like what you have become in Christ. You grow up in the grace, Word, righteousness, and holiness of God. You become more and more like Jesus, being conformed into His image by the ministry of God within you (II Corinthians 3:18). This is called "practical" sanctification because it relates principle to practice in Christian living.

Grow in grace. When II Peter 3:18 calls upon us to "grow in grace," it is making an appeal to practical sanctification. You can grow in grace in two ways. (1) You grow in grace as you understand and appreciate more

fully the grace God has shown to you. (2) You grow in grace as you manifest grace (undeserved and unmerited favor) toward people about you.

"Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, . . . knowledge, . . . temperance, . . . patience, . . . godliness, . . . brotherly kindness, and . . . charity" (II Peter 1:5-7). As you move toward maturity by developing those graces in your life, you will experience increasing practical sanctification. You will be behaving more and more like Jesus, in whom all those virtues existed in perfection. Grace will enable you to manifest those virtues.

Grow in the Word. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (I Peter 2:2). There are two ways you can grow in the Word of God. (1) You grow in the Word by increasing your understanding of the Word. Therefore, study your Bible regularly and diligently. It will feed your spirit, and you will grow in Christlikeness.

(2) You grow in the Word by applying the principles of God's Word to your daily life. Jesus said God's truth will sanctify you. Jesus cleanses His church "with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26). The fruit of righteousness is produced in the person who lives by the Word of God.

Grow in righteousness. You are already perfect in the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. All the fullness of Deity dwells permanently in Him, and you have received His fullness because you are in Him (Colossians 1:9, 10). You have already been made the righteousness of God in Christ (II Corinthians 5:21). That can never be improved or increased. But you can grow in your manifesting His imputed righteousness in your spirit by conduct which agrees with your confession.

In fact, the goal of every Christian is to purify himself just as Christ is pure. The will of God is that we live sanctified lives in which the body is made subject to the Spirit. So we present our bodies to the Lord as a living sacrifice and resolve to be separated from the evil world system in which we live. We flee from the lusts of the flesh and refuse to satisfy them in ways which God would not approve. We hear God's command, "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now ye are light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8). Each of us has both the responsibility and the opportunity to be "a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use" (II Timothy 2:21).

Grow in holiness. Holiness is the withdrawal from what is unclean plus consecration to what is divine, sacred, and pure. Both withdrawal and consecration are involved. In New Testament usage, holiness also includes the carrying forward and completing of the spiritual-ethical requirements involved in being set apart (sanctified) for God.

Holiness is demanded of all of God's saints. They live under the imperative, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Corinthians 7:1). They recognize that without holiness no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). God calls to each of them, "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Peter 1:16). To fail to live a holy life-style is to sin against God.

Holiness is possible in each believer in Christ. But it does not come easily. God knew we needed help to grow in that life-style, so He designed the church to assist us. In the church He placed apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers in order to equip the saints that they might serve one another, with the result of the maturing of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16). Had you thought that your pastor's great ministry is to help you develop a holy life-style in the Lord? It is. Seek to increase in holiness daily.

The Christian life begins with birth. It continues with growth. It is the privilege of each Christian to develop the likeness of Jesus in his life and be a "Christ-ian" in truth. Remember this truth: It is not enough to give God the best you are; you must give Him the best you can become!

1. How would you define sanctification?
2. How does Leviticus 20:26 explain sanctification?
3. How is sanctification related to your being a saint?
4. What is your position as a believer in Christ?
5. How were you sanctified unto the Lord?
6. How can you grow in grace?
7. How can you grow in the Word?
8. How can you grow in righteousness?
9. How can you grow in holiness?
10. Why must you give God the best you can become?

7

Eternally Secure

"All believers are eternally secure in Jesus Christ (John 10:24-30; Romans 8:35-39). They are born again (John 3:3-5; I John 5:1; I Peter 1:23), made new creatures in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17; II Peter 1:4), and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9; I John 4:4), enabling their perseverance in good works (Ephesians 2:10). A special providence watches over them (Romans 8:28; I Corinthians 10:13), and they are kept by the power of God (Philippians 1:6; 2:12, 13; I Peter 1:3-5; Hebrews 13:5)."

—Doctrinal Statement

God wants us to have no question about whether or not we are saved (I John 5:13). Neither would He have us question whether or not we are secure in Christ. All three persons of the Holy Trinity are committed to our security in salvation.

The doctrine of eternal security of the believer in Jesus Christ is a blessed truth. But it is greatly misunderstood. Many think it means that one can trust Jesus, live any reprobate lifestyle, and still go to heaven. Some fear it is an encouragement for careless living by a Christian. Only a misunderstanding of the doctrine would produce such thoughts. The doctrine praises the grace of God and challenges the believer to live holily because God has saved him with an eternal salvation.

The believer can feel secure in his salvation. His security is based on three things: the power of God the Father, the ministry of God the Son, and the agency of God the Spirit.

The Power of God the Father

The Father "borns" us into His family. John 1:11-13 distinguishes between natural birth and spiritual birth. We Christians are not born of the flesh (thereby making us the people of God), but we are born of God, who gives us His Holy Spirit. Anyone who believes in Jesus is born of God (I John 5:1). The Word of God leads us to the truth of sin and salvation; so the Bible says we are "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of

God, which liveth and abideth forever" (I Peter 1:23).

The Father places us "in Christ" where we become new persons, just as if we were created anew. That means His providential care watches over us continually that the good work which He has begun in us will be performed until the day of the Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6). He works continually in us to create the desire and perform the fullness of His design for us. Therefore, "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

The saved are kept eternally through the power of God.

The Father keeps us by His power until we receive our inheritance—incorruptible, undefiled, unfading—which is reserved in heaven for each of His dear children (I Peter 1:3-5). We are in the hand of the Father and the Son. There is no power which is able to take us out of His hand (John 10:28-30). We do not fear because we know He is able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before His presence with exceeding joy (Jude 24).

The Father redeems us eternally. His chain of sovereign grace reaches from before time (foreknowledge and predestination), through time (called and justified), and even beyond time (glorification) as Romans 8:29, 30 so clearly states. Because He purposes for us in view of difficulties we never quits loving us in time. His love does not change in view of enemies of the face from the world: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or sword. Neither does His love change in the face of enemies of the spiritual realm: death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, or anything else in creation. Read Romans 8:35-59 and rejoice in the unchanging love the Father has to you.

The Ministry of God the Son

What God the Father purposed in eternity before time, God the Son performed in time. The theme of Jesus' ministry was, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). What the Father predicted in the Old Testament the Son fulfilled in the New Testament. Again and again Matthew says of events in the life of Jesus, "This was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying . . ."

The ministry of the Son may be gathered up under two great categories: (1) what He did for us in His incarnate ministry on earth and (2) what He is doing for us in His infinite ministry in heaven. On earth He redeemed us by His death and resurrection. In heaven He intercedes for us before the Father.

He redeemed us by His death and resurrection. God's law that "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22) explains the necessity of the death of our Savior. We had sinned; universally and inexcusably the whole human race had sinned (Romans 3:9-19). The only way for us to be rescued from our sins was by the death of an innocent and perfect sacrifice in our place. Jesus came and died "for us" (in our place and on our behalf) so we could come to God through Him. God has made it possible for us to "have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7). Think about it! "When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Romans 5:10).

That means our sins are forgiven, removed as far from us as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12), remembered no more (Jeremiah 31:34), buried in the sea (Micah 7:19), washed away (Revelation 1:5), and removed so that the guilt of forgiven sin will never face us again.

That is the "eternal redemption" mentioned in Holy Scripture (Hebrews 9:12). It is so complete that nothing needs to be added to it. You may accept His offer just as it is and be saved totally and eternally, today. Knowing the truth of it, enter into the good of it by repentance and faith.

He intercedes for us before the Father. Jesus' work on our behalf did not cease upon His return to the Father in heaven. At His coronation He received the name that is above every name (Philippians 2:9) and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3; 8:1). But even there He represents our interests by making intercession to God for us. Oh, how much He must love us!

His intercession assures us of our security. "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). His intercession explains how we are "preserved in Jesus Christ" (Jude 1).

His intercession is personal and compassionate. He has experienced every trial we face and understands perfectly our needs. He knows the will of God and intercedes for us according to the divine purpose. He who is both God and man represents man before God. No power or person can by accusation overcome Him who preserves us by intercession (Romans 8:34). Rejoice!

He is our advocate (1 John 2:1). As an attorney represents our interests in a court of law, so Jesus represents our interests before the Judge of all. Where else could you find anyone who could represent you before God?

Note that Jesus' intercession never ceases. It is a present intercession. It is a continuing intercession. Hebrews 7:25 teaches that He always lives in the ministry of making intercession for us. His grace has brought us safe

thus far, and His grace will take us on to the end of the way. Pause at this point and thank God for the intercessory ministry of Jesus. Even as you thank Him, He is interceding for you before the Father. When you forget to thank Him, He is interceding for you before the Father. His intercession continues when you rebel and when you obey. Thank You, Lord Jesus.

The Agency of the Holy Spirit

What the Father purposed and what the Son performed, the Holy Spirit applies to the life of one who believes in Jesus.

The first ministry of the Spirit is to enlighten the mind of the sinner so he can comprehend spiritual truth and receive the gospel (Acts 16:14). Then he convinces us of the seriousness of sin, of our lack of righteousness, and of the certainty of coming judgment (John 16:8-11). When there is the response of repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ, the Spirit "borns" the believer into the family of God (John 3:1-8). That is when a person is saved and sealed eternally.

The Holy Spirit then moves into the human spirit and takes up a personal residence within. His blessed presence is the proof or "seal" (mark, brand, identification) that one is truly a child of God (Ephesians 1:13, 14; 4:30). The Holy Spirit remains with and within the believer from that conversion experience until he stands before God in eternity. He lives the life of God in a human body. He lives the life of eternity right here in time. Think about what it means to be sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise until the day of redemption. Think of it and rejoice!

The Holy Spirit becomes a witness to our human spirits that we are truly the sons of God (Romans 8:14-16). Assurance of salvation is not based on our fluctuating emotions but on the consistent witness of the Spirit of God. There is a basis for our assurance. God himself says we are saved.

The Holy Spirit becomes all we need to live the Christian life in a non-Christian world. He is our Companion (called a "Comforter" in John 14:16). Jesus' promise never to leave us or forsake us is fulfilled in the personal presence of the Holy Spirit with us and within us. Rejoice, dear Christian. He is there totally apart from our feelings, whether we feel His presence or not. Rejoice!

The Holy Spirit is active in us. He teaches us, leads us, convicts us of wrongs, assures us, empowers us, and takes the things of God to make them real to us. Every contact we have with God, whether in our prayers to Him or His ministry to us, is through the agency of the Holy Spirit. No wonder the Bible counsels us, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30).

Look back over the ground we have covered in this study. The lesson

Here's What We Believe

subject is "Eternally Secure." We have reviewed the ministry of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Why? Because our security of the believer in Jesus is the work of God, not the accomplishment of man.

1. What do we mean by the term *eternally secure*?
2. How does being born again teach security in Christ?
3. How does our being "in Christ" teach security?
4. How do *eternal* and *everlasting* speak of security?
5. How does the redeeming deed of Christ teach security?
6. How does Hebrews 9:12 teach security?
7. How does the intercession of Jesus guarantee security?
8. How does the indwelling of the Spirit show us security?
9. What power in heaven or on earth can overcome the Trinity of God?
10. How does the doctrine of security encourage your loyalty to Christ?

8

The True Church

"A New Testament church is a local congregation (Acts 16:5; I Corinthians 4:17) of baptized believers in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:41) who are united by covenant in belief of what God has revealed and in obedience to what He has commanded (Acts 2:41, 42)."

"She acknowledges Jesus as her only Head (Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18), and the Holy Bible as her only rule of faith and practice (Isaiah 8:20; II Timothy 3:16, 17), governing herself by democratic principles (Acts 6:1-6; I Corinthians 5:1-5) under the oversight of her pastors (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24)."

What do you mean when you speak of the "church"? The word is used in so many different ways in our English language that we almost need to ask for a definition when we hear it.

Church is used geographically, as "the church of England." It is used denominationally, as "the Baptist church" or "the Methodist church." It is used institutionally, as when we say, "Jesus instituted the church." It is used universally, as when one speaks of "the universal church" and includes all the saved. It is used locally to refer to the assembly of Christians in a particular place, as defined in the following comments.

Our confusion is not due to God's failure to reveal the truth about the church. In the New Testament the term *church* refers to a local congregation of Christians in every instance in which it is used. The Greek term *ekklesia*, which is commonly translated "church" in its religious usage, refers to an assembly of people who are called together to consider a matter. Some things are said of the local congregation of Christians which are true of the whole family of God, but the thrust of the New Testament is on the church as a local assembly. That is the meaning to be applied as the term is used in this study.

The Nature of the Church
The church is a local congregation.
That is evident from the consideration of the

"Instituted by Jesus during His personal ministry on earth (Matthew 16:18; Mark 3:13-19; John 1:35-51), true churches have continued to the present and will continue until Jesus returns (Matthew 16:18; 28:20)."

"Pastors and deacons are the permanent officers divinely ordained in a New Testament church (Philippians 1:1). Each church may select men of her choice to fill those offices under the leading of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:1-6; 20:17, 18) according to the divinely given qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-13.)"

"Pastors (elders, bishops) are authorized to oversee and teach the churches under the Lordship of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24; 1 Peter 5:1-4). Each church is

usage of the term *ekklesia* used in the Greek New Testament and commonly translated as "church." The term means "assembly, a called out assembly of free people." It occurs 115 times in the Greek New Testament. It has a secular usage three times and is translated as "assembly" (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). It has an institutional usage three times in reference to the church as an

Jesus established His church to carry out His commission.

institution in human society as the home, the state, or the school (Matthew 16:18; 18:17). There is no question but that in ninety occurrences it refers to a local congregation of Christians because the congregation is named seventeen times, the term is plural thirty-five times, and the context shows a local meaning thirty-eight times. In the other appearances of the word in the New Testament (primarily in Ephesians and Colossians) it could have a broader meaning, but its primary application is still to the local assembly. That is why our Doctrinal Statement reads, "The church is a local congregation"

The church is a believing assembly.

Only those who are believers in Jesus Christ can be members of an assembly of believers. The book of Acts makes it quite clear that a candidate for church membership must confess his faith in Jesus Christ by the ordinance of water baptism (Acts 2:41, 47; 8:36, 37; 19:1-5). An unbeliever may have his name on the membership roll of a church, but he is not a true member.

The church is a baptized assembly.

There is no record of conversion without baptism in all the New Testament except the thief who trusted Jesus just before he died on the cross (Luke 23:39-43). Christian baptism is

The Bible is her guidebook. She is not bound by decisions of councils, synods, or associations. She believes and behaves according to the instructions of that Book. The congregation votes to determine details of her program, but it is limited to teach and support ministries which biblical principles would approve. The church is bound by the Book.

Pastors are the leaders, the human heads of the church, appointed by the Lord Jesus himself. They are the "shepherds of the flock," the "overseers of the body," the "rulers of the congregation" in biblical terminology. They are not dictators, of course, but they are assigned by the Holy Spirit to lead the churches under the headship of Jesus Christ.

28:20; Acts 2:42) and discipline (Matthew 18:17, 18; I Corinthians 5:1-5)."

"She is free to associate with true churches in furthering the faith (II Corinthians 11:8; Philippians 4:10, 15, 16) but is responsible to keep herself from those who hold doctrines or practices contrary to Holy Scripture (Galatians 1:8, 9; I John 2:19). In association with other churches, each church is equal and is the sole judge of the measure and method of her cooperation (Matthew 20:25-28). In all matters of polity and practice, the will of each church is final (Matthew 18:18)."

—Doctrinal Statement

The Perpetuity of the Church

The first church was established in Palestine during the personal ministry of Jesus on earth. His statement, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18), was declarative of what He would do during His incarnate ministry, not what He would do through the Holy Spirit after His ascension and coronation.

His promise that "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18) has proven true, for true churches have continued to exist in every age since that time to present. I am sorry we cannot trace those churches by the name "Baptist" through the centuries. But we can trace them through doctrines taught and practices followed.

Churches which are true to Jesus will be here when He returns. They will continue in spite of apostasy and persecution as they have continued to this day. When the Lord returns, He will find faith on the earth!

The Officers of the Church

Pastors are the shepherds of the church. Deacons are the servants of the church. When faithful men of God fulfill the functions of the offices of pastor and deacon, the

church will be strong and her witness will have an impact for Christ. God appoints the pastors (Acts 20:28), and the church selects the deacons (Acts 6:1-6); but both are accountable to God for faithful service.

The Ministry of the Church

How effective is your church in evangelizing sinners? How much does your gospel message reach beyond your church building? How many did your church lead to Christ and baptize in the last twelve months? How well are members of your church growing through the educational program of your church? How consistent is your church in keeping herself pure by the discipline of erring members? The answer to those questions will reveal how faithful your church is to the ministry which Jesus assigned to her.

The Fellowship of the Church

Baptist churches form local, state, and national associations in "furthering the faith." In all those associational relationships, each church is equal to every other church. There is no "big I and little you" among the Lord's churches. Since each is the body of Christ in her community, each body is equal to every other body.

Churches may participate in community associations which are committed to promoting moral values in the community. However, each church must be sure that she does not compromise her doctrine, witness, or ministry by such affiliations.

Jesus loves each church. He gave himself for sinners and redeemed them. Then the Holy Spirit brought redeemed saints together in local churches. If we love Jesus, we must love His churches also and show it by participating in their instruction, fellowship, worship, and witness. "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end" (Ephesians 3:21).

9

The Church Ordinances

"Baptism is the immersion in water of a believer as a confession of his faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:4) and is prerequisite to church membership and participation in the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:41, 42)."

"The Lord's Supper is the sacred sharing of the bread of communion and the cup of blessing by the assembled church (Acts 20:7) as a memorial to the crucified body and

A church ordinance is a ritual or ceremony with a spiritual meaning which Jesus ordained to be observed by a New Testament church. It does not convey saving grace, but testifies by demonstration the fact of God's saving grace which He has offered and the believer has received.

We believe there are two ordinances which Jesus set in His churches. The initial ordinance is baptism. It is the declaration that one has become a Christian by faith in Jesus. It is to be received one time by the believer and need never be repeated. The continuing ordinance is the Lord's Supper. It is to be observed over and over as a reminder of the Lord's death and a prophecy of His return. The order of the ordinances must ever remain the same: baptism first and the Lord's Supper after baptism.

Some have put a misplaced emphasis on the ordinances. Rather than the rituals being a testimony to grace already received, some have declared them to be the means by which we receive God's grace. Not so. Baptism does not save. The Lord's Supper does not sanctify. They testify, in turn, that one has been saved and is growing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Ordinance of Christian Baptism

Baptism is immersion in water. That is its mode. The English word *baptize* is a transliteration of the Greek word *baptizo*. The word

means "to dip; to plunge; to submerge." It occurs ninety times in the New Testament, seventy-five times as a verb and fifteen times as a noun. There are other distinct Greek words which means "to pour" and "to sprinkle." Those are never used in the New Testament in reference to baptism. To baptize is "to dip, to plunge, to submerge." Baptism is immersion. Immersion was the only form of baptism known among Christians for a full century after the ministry of Jesus. When other forms appeared, they were considered a heresy.

The Bible describes baptism in terms of immersion. John the Baptist baptized where there was "much water" (John 3:23). Baptism is a going down into the water, a burial, in the water, and a coming up out of the water (Acts 8:36-39). It pictures a burial and resurrection (Romans 6:4). That was the kind of baptism Jesus received (Matthew 28:19) and which He commanded us to receive and practice (Matthew 28:19). How can we better picture the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, with our own death to sin and resurrection to new life, than by immersion?

shed blood of Jesus Christ (Luke 22:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Both ordinances must be administered by the authority of a New Testament church (Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26)."
—Doctrinal Statement

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only New Testament church ordinances.

Baptism is immersion in water of a believer in Jesus Christ (Acts 8:36-38; 19:4, 5) who has repented of sin (Matthew 3:1-8; Acts 2:38) and has received the word of God (Acts 2:41) and the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-48; 19:1-7). There is a description of a proper candidate for baptism.

Who may be baptized? Only a person who believes. Philip responded to the Ethiopian's request for baptism, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." Only when the man responded, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," did Philip baptize him (Acts 8:37, 38). To baptize an unbeliever (whether an infant not yet capable of faith or an adult not willing to trust Jesus) is a perversion of the Lord's ordinance. A person receives the Holy Spirit the moment he believes (Romans 8:9), and he who has not received the Spirit is not a candidate for baptism because he is not saved

(Acts 19:1-9). What was your condition when you were baptized?

Baptism is immersion in water of a believer in Jesus Christ as a confession of his personal faith in Jesus and forgiveness of sins already received. Every example in the New Testament shows that personal faith precedes baptism. By faith we become children of God (Galatians 3:27). In baptism we confess to what we have received. Baptism, therefore, is not necessary to receive salvation. It testifies to grace already experienced.

Baptism is by the authority of a New Testament church. The Great Commission which Jesus gave to His churches has three elements: (1) evangelism, (2) baptism, and (3) discipleship training. So we say the Lord gave His churches the authority to administer baptism.

But the church's authority goes further than authorizing the act of baptism. She has authority to validate baptism—to confirm the validity of a baptism which has already been performed. For instance, if a person comes to your church and desires membership based on the baptism he has already received, your church has the authority to investigate and confirm that his baptism is valid or to declare that baptism invalid. Thus the church can deal with baptisms which she does not administer. The church validates the baptism of candidates who come to her because she witnesses the ordinance. But to keep from error she must also exercise authority on those coming by transfer of membership from another church. Your church has that authority.

Baptism is a prerequisite to church membership and participation in the Lord's Supper. The proof of that statement is that there is no record in the Bible of any person being admitted to membership in a church or to the Lord's table apart from a confession of faith in baptism. While we cannot produce book, chapter, and verse which lays down that rule, we can feel confident about it on the basis of the practice of New Testament churches.

The Ordinance of the Lord's Supper

What is the proper name for this ordinance? It is not a sacrament, if that means it confers saving grace. It is a sacred and solemn ceremony, of course. It is a eucharist because it is a time of thanks and grateful praise. It is communion because it permits special fellowship with Jesus and with fellow Christians in a very sacred ceremony. It is an ordinance since it was ordained (instituted, commanded) by Jesus. It is the Lord's Supper because the emphasis is on the Lord. He instituted it and commanded its observance "in remembrance of me" (I Corinthians 11:24, 25). Baptists commonly call the memorial the Lord's Supper.

How did it begin? Jesus and His twelve apostles gathered in an up-

per room of a private home in Jerusalem to observe the Jewish Passover. After the Passover meal had ended, Jesus took the unleavened bread and the cup which was left over and instituted the Lord's Supper. The Supper is not a meal. It used only the remnants of a meal. Its purpose is not to satisfy hunger or thirst but to remember the sufferings of the Lord Jesus on our behalf.

How is it administered? The Lord's Supper was instituted as Jesus and His disciples were assembled in a private home. The early churches must have observed it in private homes also, since that was the meeting places of the first Christians. The ordinance was observed in a meeting of believers, not as a private family affair.

The assembled believers ate the bread and drank from the cup as a testimony to the death of the Savior. It was never intended as a meal to satisfy hunger; and when it was made so, it ceased to be the Lord's Supper that was observed (I Corinthians 11:20-22).

Churches observe the ordinance today by eating the broken bread and drinking the fruit of the grape (which looks much like the color of blood) in remembrance of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. It is always a most solemn observance.

What is the purpose of it? The biblical statements concerning the Supper indicate three great purposes in it. (1) It is a memorial of Jesus. He said to do it "in remembrance of me." (2) It is a testimony to the world. Its proper observance will "shew the Lord's death." (3) It is a statement of faith. Since we do it in remembrance of Jesus "till he come," the observance is a statement that we expect His return.

Why do you partake of the Lord's Supper? It must be because you trust Him, love Him, live in Him, and desire to fellowship with Him. While no saving grace is conferred in the ordinance, it is a unique and special time of fellowship with Him. Do not neglect the observance of the Supper with your church.

Who may partake of it? Christians are greatly divided over this question. There are three common opinions current today. (1) "Open communion" means the invitation is open to anyone who wishes to share. Some would limit the participants to confessed Christians, regardless of their denomination or doctrine; while others would open it to anyone, whether he has confessed Christ or not. (2) "Close communion" means the invitation is extended to those who are in doctrinal agreement with the observing church. Those of "like faith and order" may participate. (3) "Closed communion" (also called "strict communion") means only a member of the local congregation may participate. Some churches limit that further to active members, not including any negligent members present.

The Bible sets forth three absolute standards to govern those with whom

we eat. (1) One must be saved. We eat at a table where those who do not trust Jesus have no right to eat (Hebrews 13:10). (2) One must be baptized. There is no text in the New Testament which clearly states this, but the example of New Testament Christians indicates that they practiced this rule. (3) One must live an orderly life-style. One is excluded if he causes "divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned" (Romans 16:17). One is excluded if he "walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (II Thessalonians 3:6). One is to be excluded if he is "a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner" (I Corinthians 5:11). One is to be excluded if he holds false doctrines as a "heretick" (Titus 3:10). One is to be excluded if he is out of fellowship with the Lord or with the people of the Lord in doctrine or practice. How well do you measure up when you come to the Lord's Supper?

How do I prepare to receive it? The Supper must be received after self-examination, self-judgment and self-discipline (I Corinthians 11:28-34). The church should not have to judge a person. He should have such a sense of awe at approaching the Lord's table that he would examine himself most carefully.

Come, then, to the Lord's table. Come reverently, for it is a sacred event. Come thankfully, for Jesus died for you. Come humbly, so that all you are and have is available to Him who died for you and saved you.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper have been ordained (appointed and established) in New Testament churches. Each member should be careful to participate in both ordinances as a testimony of his faith and obedience to the Lord. Participate with reverent joy. The ordinances testify to what you have received in Jesus.

1. What do we mean by the term "church ordinance"?
2. Why do we say that there are only two church ordinances?
3. Why are we baptized but once but observe the Supper many times?
4. Why do we believe that baptism is immersion in water?
5. Why do we insist that only a believer in Jesus may be baptized?
6. What is the purpose of baptism?
7. How did the Lord's Supper begin to be observed?
8. What is the purpose of the Supper?
9. What are the qualifications of one who can partake?
10. How can you make the ordinances more meaningful in your own heart?



Civil Government

Is there a biblical doctrine concerning civil government? Yes, indeed. The four basic institutions of human society are home, state, church, and school. God gives principles governing each in Holy Scripture. This week's study deals with Bible principles concerning civil government.

God and Government

God instituted human government. It has been said that "God made man capable of governing everything except himself." That is why He instituted human government. Since each person cannot govern himself, God set up a system by which each would be governed by other people.

When Romans 13:1, 2, calls for each person to be subject to the governing authorities, it gives two great reasons why. (1) The authority residing in human government has been ordained (instituted, set up) by God himself. (2) To resist duly constituted government is to resist what God has ordained. And that is sin! There are no exceptions to that requirement. "Every soul" means each person. "Let each one obey the governing authorities." No one is exempt from that requirement.

But what if the government is not a Christian government? What if the officer of government is not a Christian person? That does not change the requirement. The Romans government was pagan, with the Caesar calling him-

"Human government was instituted by God to protect the innocent and punish the guilty. It is separate from the church, though both church and state exercise complementary ministries for the benefit of society (Matthew 22:21)."

"Christians should submit to the authority of the government under which they live, obeying all laws which do not contradict the laws of God, respecting officers of government, paying taxes, rendering military service, and praying for the welfare"

of the nation and its leaders (Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13, 17; I Timothy 2:1, 2). They should vote, hold office, and exercise influence to direct the nation after the principles of Holy Scripture."

"Civil authority is not to interfere in matters of conscience or disturb the institutions of religion (Acts 4:18-20), but it should preserve for every citizen the free exercise of his religious convictions."

"Churches should receive no subsidy from the government, but they should be exempt from taxation on property and money used for the common good through worship, education, or benevolence."

—Doctrinal Statement

self a "god," when Paul wrote these words. God instituted government. To submit to government is to submit to God.

God intends government to maintain order in society. That is why we should pray for all who are in positions of authority (I Timothy 2:1-4). As government maintains order, the citizens can live quietly and peaceably. The gospel can be preached, and people can be saved. There is both a civil and a sacred purpose in maintaining a stable government. Ask the missionaries who serve in countries which are politically unstable. Each will report that an orderly society is much more conducive to the gospel ministry.

God placed great authority in the institution of human government. Genesis 9:6 establishes capital punishment as a function of government. Romans 13:4 speaks of the "sword," using a term which means the executioner's sword. God gave governments the authority to enforce obedience and punish disobedience on the part of those who harm the welfare of society.

It is surprising to hear Romans 13:4 speak of the officer of government as *"the minister of God to thee for good."* That term *"minister"* is used of Jesus, the apostles, other Christians, and even of you. A minister is one who does the will of God in the place assigned to him. Since the officer of government is doing the will of God by maintaining an orderly society, he is the servant (minister) of God. Therefore, respect the officials of your government, whatever their political party.

Citizens and Government

Citizens are to pray for good government (I Timothy 2:1, 2). This is more than saying, "God, bless our nation." It is to include the whole scope of praying: *"supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks."*

Is that the way you pray for your rulers? Since God answers prayer, citizens get the kind of government they pray for. If we do not have good government, it is because we have not prayed for good government. Do not blame this political party or that one. God is greater than all political affiliations and can work His will through a party or in spite of it. Pray for good government in your land. It is particularly important for us to pray in those years when public officials are elected by vote. Did you pray before you voted? Did you ask for Christian men and women with high moral and ethical standards to be elected? Christians could change the course of our nation if we would only pray as God calls upon us to pray.

Both church and state exercise complementary ministries for the benefit of society.

Citizens are to submit to the officers and the requirements of government. Romans 13:1, 2, 5 is especially strong in teaching that requirement. First, there is a call for submission to duly instituted authority. Then, there is an explanation that civil authority is a reflection of God's authority. Next, there is a warning that to rebel against civil authority is to rebel against divine authority. Finally, there is a warning that to resist duly constituted authority will bring one under wrath and judgment by that authority.

But there is more involved than fear of punishment. We are to be submissive to civil authority, not only because we fear the penalty, but also as a matter of conscience which testifies that it is the right thing to do. Obey the laws. You will escape punishment for law-breaking, and you will feel good also.

There is another reason for civil obedience. Not only will you escape punishment and have a clear conscience, but you will also be a witness and *"put to silence the ignorance of foolish men"* (I Peter 2:13-17). That is, you will be a witness for Jesus. That is the greatest reason of all, isn't it? The Christian citizen should be the best citizen in the nation.

Citizens are to pay the taxes required by government. Jesus said, *"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's"* (Matthew 22:21). Paul wrote, *"Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour"* (Romans 13:7). Because the officer of government is the minister (servant) of God, we must pay taxes to support him in his God-assigned duties (Romans 13:6).

But what if the government squanders my tax money on programs with which I disagree? I must continue to pay taxes and work to elect officers of

government who will be good stewards. Because someone else misses the will of God, I have no excuse to disobey Him also.

Jesus put the "render unto Caesar" and "render unto God" in the same sentence. I am as much obligated to meet the requirement to pay taxes as I am to give to the work of God.

Citizens are to have a higher allegiance to God than to human government. There may be occasions when officers of government will rebel against God and try to require a Christian citizen to disobey God in order to obey the government. In such a case the Christian must always have supreme allegiance to God. Like certain of the first Christians, we might have to say to officials, "*Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*" (Acts 4:19, 20). "*We ought to obey God rather than men*" (Acts 5:29).

Christian disobedience should be for religious convictions. The Christian is not to engage in riots or other forms of breaking the law by violence. He should simply walk with the Lord in a calm spirit and let the occasion be a testimony to his faith in Jesus Christ.

Church and Government

Did you know that the constitution of the United States of America does not speak of a "separation of church and state"? It limits the legislature against passing any laws which would favor one religion over another, thus establishing a formal state-sponsored church. It restricts the legislature against passing any laws which would infringe upon the free exercise of religion by each citizen. But it does not say there should be no interchange between church and state.

The state needs the input of the church. The church needs to keep reminding the citizenry and its rulers of the ethical/moral principles of revealed religion. It should be the conscience of a nation, calling awareness to abuses and seeking their correction. Our founding fathers never thought of a strictly secular government, as is being promoted today.

The church and state are separate institutions. Each is to respect the areas and ministries of the other, recognizing the contribution each makes to society. But neither is to interfere in the ordinary affairs of the other.

Church and state can contribute each to the strength of the other. The church can support the state by prayer. The state can support the church by protection. But the church is to receive no subsidy from the state, and the state is to set no requirement on the church. The church should be freed from taxation on property used for worship, education, or benevolence. Such use contributes to the welfare of society and the strength of the state. Since the good done reflects back upon the state, it loses nothing

by exemption from taxes. However, the churches should not own commercial property or engage in business without paying the same taxes which all other businesses are required to pay. In that case they are in competition with tax-paying businesses and should not be exempt.

For the church to receive a tax subsidy from the state, there must be some element of control by the state. That would violate the autonomy of the church under her Head, Jesus Christ. So the church should receive no such financial support. A religious institution that receives public funds should not complain when it is asked to follow guidelines set by public officials.

The Christian should make every effort to be an exemplary citizen. It would be a great witness for Jesus Christ if every Christian would obey the laws, respect the officials, vote in elections, serve in the military, hold public offices, pray for the peace of the nation, and otherwise seek to influence government for the good of society and the glory of God apart from sectarian interests.

It is not asking too much to expect Christians to be the best citizens. Stop and take an inventory of your citizenship. Use the principles of this study as a measurement. In any area you appear weak, work to strengthen yourself there. Remember that Christian citizenship is obedience to God.

1. What was the origin of human government?
2. Why did God institute government?
3. Why should Christians pray for their government?
4. In what sense are officers of government servants of God?
5. How is paying taxes an act of obedience to God?
6. Under what circumstances should a Christian refuse to obey the law?
7. What should be the relationship of church and state?
8. How can the Christian exercise influence on his government?
9. What should make the Christian the best citizen?
10. How can you be a better Christian citizen?

11

The Second Coming of Christ

"Our risen Lord will return personally in bodily form to receive His redeemed unto himself. His return is imminent (I Thessalonians 4:13-17; Revelation 22:20). After Jesus returns, all of the dead will be raised bodily, each in his own order: the righteous dead in 'the resurrection of life' and the wicked dead in 'the resurrection of damnation' (John 5:24-29; I Corinthians 15:20-28)."
 —Doctrinal Statement

"Jesus is coming!"

Does that announcement quicken your pulse and arouse your emotions with glad anticipation? It is called *"the blessed hope"* for every child of God (Titus 2:13). What is your response to it?

The return of the Lord Jesus is a basic theme which runs through all the New Testament. It is the continuation of the promises in the Old Testament of a coming Messiah. He came. He comes again.

This thrilling doctrine has been abused by the exaggeration of its friends. Some have foolishly set dates for His return, even though the Bible says no one knows the date. Others have developed hair-brained schemes of events related to His return. But in spite of all the confusion, the saints glory in the fact that the Lord is coming soon.

The Bible is so clear in its statements on the subject that it must be accepted by everyone who believes that the Bible is true.

Jesus Will Return

The patriarchs of the Old Testament believed the Savior would come to earth. Job testified, *"I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth"* (Job 19:25). When do you suppose are those "latter days" which Job foresaw? They are the days in which we live, the days which seem to be the end of this age. *"Enoch also,*

the seventh from Adam, prophesied, . . . saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all" (Jude 14, 15). It is amazing that within seven generations of the creation of mankind there was a prophecy of the coming of the Savior. Apparently, God placed it in the consciousness of the race, and so it passed to all persons.

The prophets described the return of the Savior. Isaiah saw the blessings of the Messianic kingdom when the natural animosity between the animals would be removed and the hostility between people would cease because the Lord would reign. That time has not come, so it must be yet future. Daniel saw a stone cut without hands which crushed the kingdoms of the world and grew until it filled all the earth—a prophecy of the coming kingdom of God when *"the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever"* (Revelation 11:15).

Jesus foretold His return. He said it would be witnessed worldwide like the lightning flashes in the east and is seen even in the west (Matthew 24:27). He said it would be with power and in the clouds of heaven (Matthew 26:64). He said it would be to receive us to himself, suddenly, and we would be also (John 14:3). He said it would be quickly, suddenly, and without warning (Revelation 22:20). He would not have told it and repeated it if it were not certain. You can take His word for it.

The apostles preached His return. One promised that *"unto them who look for him shall he appear the second time"* (Hebrews 9:28). They looked for His coming to be soon, feeling it was near at hand (James 5:8). It would be *"the Lord himself"* who would come, indicating they expected a bodily and personal appearance (I Thessalonians 4:16). He would come to judge the living and dead and to institute His kingdom (II Timothy 4:1). They expected Christians to look forward with glad anticipation to the appearing of the Savior (Titus 2:13).

The clear and repeated testimony of Holy Scripture is that Jesus is coming. He came in fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies. He comes to fulfill other of the Old Testament and all of the New Testament prophecies. His coming is certain.

Jesus May Return at Any Time

The Bible describes the conditions at the time when Jesus returns. It will be a time of social unrest (II Timothy 3:1-5). It will be a time of amazing changes in the international affairs of nations (Luke 21:25; Ezekiel 3, 39; Daniel 11; Revelation 13). It will be a time of religious revolution. Apostasy will appear in the form of scoffers at the promises of God (II Peter 3:3, 4), heretics in religious doctrine (I Timothy 4:1-3), coldness of devo-

tion among professed people of God (Matthew 24:12), and many deceivers in the field of religion (Matthew 24:5, 24:27; II Timothy 3:13).

There will be a movement toward an apostate one-world church (Revelation 13:12, 16) at the same time there is a great evangelistic harvest around the world (Matthew 24:14). A witness to His return is a spiritual yearning among the saints of God (Hebrews 10:25; Luke 21:28).

Do not try to set events which must transpire before the Lord can appear. That would deny the repeated Bible statement that His return is imminent, even at the door. There is no prophecy which must be fulfilled before His return that would keep Him from coming this minute if He so chose. Live as if He might come before you sleep tonight or before you awake in the morning. Be as the servant who looks for his master. Be ready at the instant in which He may return, whenever it may be.

Jesus is coming to earth again.

Jesus Will Return to Conclude the Age

The Jews thought of time in two divisions: the present age and the age to come. That age to come was to them the age of the Messiah. It is the same to us. The return of Jesus will end the present age and usher in another age called the day of the Lord.

His coming will be audible. A trumpet blast will announce His arrival. He did not cry or lift up His voice that it might be heard in the streets when He was here in His incarnate ministry (Isaiah 42:2). But a trumpet blast heard around the world will announce His return. The only time the Bible mentions that Jesus lifted up His voice was when He commended His spirit to God at His death on the cross (Luke 23:46). But everyone will hear when He returns.

"Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence . . . He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself" (Psalm 50:3-6).

His coming will be personal. It is *"the Lord himself"* who shall descend from heaven with a shout (I Thessalonians 4:16). The very same Jesus who went up into heaven at His ascension will descend from heaven at His appearing (Acts 1:11). He said, *"I will come again, and receive you unto myself"* (John 14:3). How much He must love us!

His coming will be glorious. *"Power and great glory"* shall attend His appearing (Matthew 24:30). Why would it be otherwise? He will appear as God, not as man when He came before. We cannot imagine the glory that

will be revealed in Him. But when the apostle John saw Him in a vision, he fell at His feet as if dead because he was so overcome by the Lord's glorious majesty (Revelation 1:10-20). What a day that will be!

He will come in the air. The dead saints will be resurrected in glorified bodies and the living saints will be translated in glorified bodies (both happening in an instant of time), and all will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. And so shall we be forever with the Lord (I Thessalonians 4:17).

He will come with resurrection power. Old Testament prophets foretold how He would redeem from the power of the grave and all the dead would come forth, both saved and unsaved, to stand before Him in judgment (John 5:25, 28, 29). Bodies that have been buried corruptible, dishonorable, weak, and natural will be raised incorruptible, glorious, strong, and spiritual (I Corinthians 15:42-44). The same body which was buried will be raised in the same way that the same seed that is planted will be raised (I Corinthians 15:35-38). God gives each one of us a body as He is pleased to give. We do not know just what the resurrection body will be like. But we are sure it will not be subject to age, sickness, pain, and death to which the present body is subject. We can testify with the psalmist concerning our resurrection body, *"I shall be satisfied, when I awake"* (Psalm 17:15). As we have borne the image of the earthly here (looking like our parents), so we will bear the image of the heavenly there (looking like our Lord). Glory!

Caught up from earth into heaven. Caught up to the personal presence of the Lord. Caught up to be forever with Him. No wonder that is called "the blessed hope" of the believer.

Jesus Calls Us to Be Ready

The doctrine of the return of the Lord is intended to do more than to inform us of end-time events. It is designed to direct us in daily living now.

We must watch and be ready because Jesus is coming. Jesus said, *"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come"* (Matthew 24:42). His coming may be at evening, at midnight, in predawn, or at daybreak. We must be ready whenever His appearing might be (Mark 13:33). We should be ready every hour, for He may come at any hour.

We must work and be faithful because Jesus is coming. Jesus compared His departure and return to a master who went on a journey and assigned certain responsibilities to each of his servants. When he returned, he called them each to account for his stewardship. And Jesus said that is what He has done and will do when He returns (Matthew 25:14-

30). His command to us is, "Occupy till I come" (Luke 19:13). We must be busy.

We must walk and be bold because Jesus is coming. John wrote of our amazement at the love of God that He would make us His sons and call us by that title. He said it contained a hope beyond this world, which included being like Him when He shall appear. Then he wrote, "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (I John 3:3). Purity of life is directly related to our hope of the return of Jesus. "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thessalonians 5:23).

We must wait and be patient because Jesus is coming. The anticipation might tend to make us impatient. But God commands patience in the light of the soon return of the Lord Jesus (James 5:7, 8). The certainty of His coming is an incentive to our waiting, working, and watching with a calm spirit. He will certainly appear one day.

"It may be at morn, when the day is awaking,/ When sunlight thro' darkness and shadow is breaking,/ That Jesus will come in the fulness of glory,/ To receive from the world His own . . . /While hosts cry hosanna, from heaven descending,/ With glorified saints and the angels attending,/ With grace on His brow, like a halo of glory,/ Will Jesus receive His own" (H. L. Turner).

1. What is the second coming of Jesus?
2. Why is it a theme in the Bible?
3. How has the doctrine been abused?
4. What does the Old Testament say of it?
5. Why do we believe He could come at any time?
6. Why will His coming conclude this present age?
7. How can you live so as to be ready for His coming?

12

The Coming Judgments

"Prior to the eternal state, God will judge everyone to confer rewards or to consign to punishment (Matthew 25:31-46; II Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-15)."
—Doctrinal Statement

God "hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

Judgment is demanded by the very nature of God. He is just. Justice means all people, whether good or bad, must receive their due. You are headed for judgment the same as I am. Paul said, "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). That word "every" means "the entire group taken one at a time." What a solemn thought. The wise person will prepare for death and for the judgment to follow.

We distinguish between two parts of divine judgment. The saved will appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive rewards for their service for God. The unsaved will appear before the great white throne judgment to be punished for their sins and rejection of God's offer of grace in Christ. What you do with Jesus in this world, trusting Him or rejecting Him, will determine at which judgment you will appear. At this point in your spiritual life, where will you stand? If there is any question, settle it with the Lord right now.

The Judgment Seat of Christ
When will it occur? The judgment seat of Christ will be held immediately upon His return

in the air. He will appear in the air, and the saints will be resurrected/translated and caught up to meet Him there. The Bible says He will "judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (II Timothy 4:1). "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matthew 16:27). One of the first things that will happen upon the return of the Lord is for the saints to stand before His judgment seat to be rewarded.

Every person will face God in judgment.

That judgment will take place while the saints are in the air with Jesus (a period of about seven years between the events recorded in I Thessalonians 4:16, 17 and Revelation 20:1-4). When they come to the earth with their Lord, it will be to reign with Him a thousand years in His millennial kingdom (Revelation 20:4). Their judgment will determine their place in His government.

Who will be judged there? The saints of God will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Paul speaks of "we" and "us" in discussing this judgment in Romans 14. Believers are included in that pronoun, but not unbelievers. They are "the rest of the dead" who do not live (are not raised from death) until after the saints have ruled with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4, 5). Second Corinthians 5:1-10 discusses the Christian hope at death and the judgment. Paul speaks of our desiring to go to be with the Lord and our confidence in being absent from the body and present with the Lord. He concludes the discussion with these words: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, . . . whether it be good or bad" (II Corinthians 5:10). It is evident that the same persons who will be absent from the body and present with the Lord are those who will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Yes, this is the judgment of the saved.

What is the purpose of this judgment? It is not a judgment to determine who is saved and who is lost. That is determined by one's relationship to Jesus in this world. This is a judgment of works for the purpose of rewards, and salvation is not a reward for good works (Ephesians 2:8, 9). This judgment will bring believers into complete unity with Christ and one another. That is when we are made to "see eye to eye" (Isaiah 52:8). Rewards for faithful service will be conferred at the judgment seat of Christ. "Verily there is a reward for the righteous" (Psalm 58:11). Jesus said He was coming to reward everyone according to his works (Revelation 22:12). One of the aspects of that reward will be the place assigned each saint in the millennial kingdom of Christ. Jesus spoke of one having one scope of authority and another having a larger scope (Luke 19:11-28). Each will be rewarded according to his labor for the Lord. Paul wrote, "If

we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (II Timothy 2:12).

The judgment seat of Christ is a day when our conduct shall be scrutinized, our labor in the name of the Lord tested, our motives for service examined, and proper reward given. Will you be ashamed or satisfied in that day? "Now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming" (I John 2:28).

The Great White Throne Judgment

The Bible seems to make a distinction between the judgment seat of Christ and the great white throne judgment. They are never mentioned together as if they are the same. References to the judgment seat of Christ seem to always be to the judgment of the saints for the purpose of rewards. Reference to the great white throne judgment seems always to refer to the judgment of sinners for the purpose of punishment. These comments follow the premillennial order of events at the end of this age and the return of Jesus.

When will it occur? Revelation 20:1-15 refers to two resurrections of the dead. First, there is a group who participate in what is called "the first resurrection." It includes people who were martyred for their loyalty and witness to Jesus. "They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (verse 4). They stand distinct from a group referred to as "the rest of the dead." This benediction is pronounced upon those saints: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (verse 6). Without doubt, these are the saints of God. No lost person is blessed or holy or will reign with Christ. We understand that these are the ones who appear before the judgment seat of Christ. On the other hand, "the rest of the dead" are those who appear before the great white throne judgment. Notice that they lived after the thousand years in which the blessed ones reigned with Christ (verse 5). So the judgment seat of Christ comes before the millennial reign of our Lord and His saints, while the great white throne judgment comes after the millennial reign.

What will it be like? Note how this judgment is described. (1) It will be "great" in the number who appear there and the solemn verdict pronounced there. (2) It will be "white" in view of the purity of the Judge and the correctness of His decisions. (3) It is a "throne" because of the authority of Him who sits as Judge there. (4) It is a "judgment" because a legal decision based on true evidence will be given there, and the proper sentence will be executed upon those who appear there.

There is no biblical evidence that the court will follow our judicial system

on earth. Here we have a prosecution and a defense. Evidence is presented and witnesses are examined. The case is argued back and forth. Sometimes justice prevails, and sometimes the courts err. But the evidence at the great white throne judgment will be indisputable. There will be no arguments. Evidence will be presented and the verdict will be given.

Who will be the judge there? Deity will be the judge, whether God the Father or God the Son. That is evidenced in the statement that heaven and earth fled away from the face of Him who sat upon the throne. However, the Bible is more specific.

Acts 17:31 states that God has *"appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."* Whom has God raised from the dead? Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. Therefore, Jesus will be the Judge upon the throne to judge sinners.

Who will be judged there? If the saints have been before the judgment seat of Christ before they reign with Him for a thousand years, and if the rest of the dead (the sinners) were not raised until after the thousand-year reign, it must be the sinners who appear before the great white throne judgment. Note that there is no word of approval or rewards at that judgment. It is rather a judgment where condemnation and punishment are paramount. Yes, this is a judgment of the doomed.

What evidence shall be presented there? One part of the evidence will be the accusations of a guilty human conscience. Remember how Herod, because of his guilt over having John the Baptist killed, thought Jesus was John, risen from dead (Matthew 14:1, 2). Many believe that everything you ever thought, felt, heard, saw, desired, or did is written in your subconscious mind, ready to be brought to the surface in vivid remembrance.

The divine remembrance will be a part of the evidence. God takes note of His people. A record of the doings of each is written before Him. As it identifies those who are saints, so it identifies those who are sinners (Malachi 3:16). That record must be present at the great white throne judgment.

Human remembrance will be a witness also. Jesus said the rich man in hell was able to remember his circumstances on earth and the brothers he had left behind (Luke 16:25). Just so, memory will testify that God's verdict is just.

There will be books of divine records. Revelation 20:12 speaks of *"the books"* being opened without identifying them. They may be the records of daily conduct, or they may be the books of Holy Scriptures. Either way, they will testify against the sinner's rejection of God's offer of grace in

Jesus. Of course, the Book of Life is the primary witness. One whose name is not written in the Book of Life is cast into the lake of fire. That is the second death.

What will be the outcome of the judgment? There is no hope of salvation for the sinners who appear before the great white throne. They are judged in order to determine the degree of punishment they must suffer. Jesus said some will suffer more than others (Matthew 10:15; 11:22). The degree will be in intensity, not duration, because each one assigned to hell will be there eternally.

Next week's study will deal with the eternal states—the heaven to be inhabited by the saints and the hell to be endured by the sinners. What a tragic end to go into eternal hell fire, eternal punishment, torment, separation from God and all good, and to have no hope of ever escaping that suffering! What a motive for evangelism! What a call to Christ! God has set before you the way of life and the way of death. Your eternal destiny is determined in this life. As death finds you, so will the judgment. As the judgment finds you, so will all eternity. Prepare to meet God.

1. What is the "judgment seat" of Christ?
2. When will that judgment occur?
3. Who will appear before the judgment seat of Christ?
4. What is the purpose of that judgment?
5. How does it differ from the great white throne judgment?
6. When will it occur?
7. What is its purpose?
8. What evidence will be presented there?
9. What sentence will be given there?
10. How can you prepare for the judgment?

13

The Eternal States

"Heaven is the eternal home of the redeemed (John 14:1-3), who, in their glorified bodies (I Corinthians 15:51-58), will live in the presence of God forever (I Thessalonians 4:17) in ultimate blessing (Revelation 21, 22). Hell is a place of eternal punishment and suffering (Luke 16:19-31) for the devil, his angels (Matthew 25:41), and the unredeemed (Revelation 20:1-15)."

—Doctrinal Statement

Everybody has to live somewhere, and everybody has to live somewhere forever. There are but two destinies: heaven and hell. The wise person is careful about his address while on earth and will be doubly careful about his address hereafter. One may change his address in time at will, but he can never change his address in eternity.

Here are the two alternatives: To which of those two destinies are you headed?

How can we know what heaven is like and what hell is like? How can we know whether they are real or not? How can we know what it will be like to dwell in either place? The only answer to those questions is in the Bible. We must take the Bible descriptions of heaven and hell as the literal description of real places. It teaches that heaven is a place of bliss for the saints, and hell is a place of punishment for sinners.

Heaven, Home of the Saved

Isn't it interesting that we speak of heaven as a home and of hell as a destiny? It is because of the bliss of the former and the tragedy of the latter.

Where is heaven? The Bible uses the term *heaven* in three applications. First, heaven is the realm of the atmosphere where the birds fly and the clouds float (Genesis 1:20). Second, heaven is the expanse where the stars are located (Psalm 19:1, 2, 4). Third, heaven is the

place where God is revealed in His fullness and is worshiped by angels (II Corinthians 12:2-4; Revelation 21, 22). But that is not all that is said of heaven in the Bible.

One day the present heaven and earth will pass away. There will be a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. The city of God will come down from God out of heaven and will be joined to the new earth. Then will come to pass the saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be their God" (Revelation 21:3). What a blessed prospect! (To read the biblical account of those amazing events, see Romans 8:19-23; II Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21.) That new heaven and earth will be the home of the saved.

The unsaved will experience eternity in hell, but the saved will experience eternity in heaven.

Who inhabits heaven? God is there. You would expect that, of course. Without the blessed presence of God, even a heaven would be a hell. The Bible speaks repeatedly of God being in heaven, looking down from heaven, and of our going to heaven to be with Him.

The angels of God are there. Their great ministry is to worship Him (Revelation 5:11, 12; 7:11, 12) and to serve His will. They know what is happening on earth and rejoice when sinners are saved (Luke 15:7, 10). The redeemed saints are there. Heaven is the "Father's house" to them (John 14:2). They are before the throne joining in the worship of God.

What is heaven like? Heaven is a place, not a state or condition or feeling. It is a place as definite as your house on earth. It is a place of complete freedom from sin. Natural evil will no longer be experienced there because Satan and his cohorts will be cast into the lake of fire before this (Revelation 22:3). Satanic influence will no longer be experienced there (Revelation 20:10). What a wonderful place of no more evil!

Heaven is a place of perfect union with God. He will dwell personally with us, and we shall see His face with love and without fear (Revelation 21:3; II Corinthians 15:49). And there we will enjoy unceasing and unhindered fellowship with God (Revelation 22:1-6).

Heaven is a place where we will receive our inheritance which is "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" (I Peter 1:4). It will be like a room in our Father's house (John 14:1-3). What a glorious home!

Heaven is a place of fellowship with our redeemed kindred. Those of our loved ones in the flesh who have preceded us into eternity will be there, and

we will be joined with them in the presence of our Lord (II Samuel 12:18-23). Those of our loved ones in the Spirit—saints of all ages and locations and situations—will be there to share our fellowship (Matthew 8:11). What a glad reunion that will be! Imagine talking with Moses, Abraham, Isaiah, John the Baptist, and especially with Jesus. Glory!

Heaven is the realization of the ultimate goal of our redemption. Only then will we enter the fullness of the eternal life which we already possess by faith in Jesus. We will know God more and more perfectly, never exhausting His divine person. We will enjoy endless development as we keep learning of Him and enjoying fellowship with one another. Thank God for salvation in Jesus which makes heaven our home.

How is heaven described in the Bible? It is a tabernacle where God is worshiped (Revelation 21:1-8). It is a city where God dwells with His people (Revelation 21:9-27). It is a garden where God fellowships with His people and they serve Him (Revelation 22:1-5). Worship, companionship, and fellowship will all be enjoyed at the same time in the tabernacle of God, the city of God, and the garden of God.

Come on. Let's all go to heaven by faith in Jesus.

Hell, Destiny of the Doomed

Many people admit the reality of heaven but deny the existence of hell. Yet, Jesus spoke more of hell than He did of heaven. Be warned. Hell is real.

Hell is a place. It is a definitely a place as is earth or heaven. It is a place prepared for the devil and his angels, not for humans (Matthew 25:41). People who go to hell do so by their own choice in rejection of salvation in Christ. It is a place of suffering pangs like burning in a fire that is never quenched and where death never comes (Matthew 10:28; Mark 9:43, 44; Revelation 20:10). It is an eternal place of endless suffering (Matthew 25:46; Isaiah 33:14; Revelation 20:10). No person in his right mind would want to go to such a place. Every person who is not deceived by the devil will prepare to go to heaven.

Hell will be inhabited. The devil and all his angels will be there because hell is prepared for them (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 19:20; 20:10). All fallen angels will be there. The wicked and impenitent people of earth will be there because of their own choice to reject God's offer of grace in Jesus (Psalm 9:17). All persons whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life will be in hell (Revelation 20:15).

I would not want to be in a crowd like that for a little while, would you? I certainly would not want to be in a crowd like that for eternity. I'm glad to have assurance that I am going to heaven to be with the Lord and His redeemed children.

Hell is the very opposite of heaven. Heaven is a place of light; hell is a place of darkness. Heaven is a place of peace; hell is a place of torment. Heaven is a place of reward; hell is a place of punishment. Heaven is a place of joy; hell is a place of sorrow. Heaven affords fellowship with God; hell produces companionship with Satan. Heaven is enjoyed with saints; hell is endured with sinners. Who in his right mind would choose to go to hell and miss heaven? No one. But the person who rejects Jesus Christ has been blinded by Satan and is not thinking logically about spiritual things (II Corinthians 4:3, 4).

Hell is eternal. The terms *everlasting* and *eternal* are used fourteen times to refer to the duration of the righteous and seven times of the retribution of the wicked. (See Matthew 18:8; 24:42, 46; II Thessalonians 1:9; Hebrews 6:2; Jude 6.) "*For ever and ever*" occurs seventeen times concerning God's people and three times concerning the devil and his servants. (See Revelation 20:14; 21:8.) The wicked shall be punished the same duration as the righteous shall be blessed. Hell will last just as long as heaven. A denial of the eternal sufferings of the wicked is a rejection of the clear statements of Holy Scripture and a wistful desire rather than a Bible truth.

Someone has observed that if once every thousand years a bird came and took away one grain of sand, the earth would finally be removed. But the words "*for ever and ever*" break the heart. Do you catch the seriousness of your loved ones being without Christ? Do you see the destiny to which your friend or business associate is headed? How can you love a person who is bound for hell and not give him warning? Speak to someone today about security in Christ.

Hell is a place of conscious suffering as punishment. Some think that a person is like a chunk of wood which is cast into the fire, soon consumed and existing no more. Not so. Others think the fires of hell purify and one is finally transferred to heaven. Not so. Hell is a place of perpetual suffering from which there is no release.

There is the punishment of separation. Jesus' words describe the ultimate doom: "*I never knew you: depart from me*" (Matthew 7:23). The fires of hell are less suffering than the exclusion from the presence and favor of God. What a sense of loss must lay upon the mind of the condemned. He can remember all the privileges he had on earth, all the opportunities to make peace with God through Jesus Christ. Now they are gone forever. What remorse! What self-condemnation! What indescribable punishment!

There is the punishment of pain and torment under the wrath of God. The fierceness of the wrath of the Almighty God is awesome beyond words. The Bible speaks of torment, the smoke of their torment, tormented in flames, and wailing and gnashing of teeth. The suffering will be felt in

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the body as well as the anguish felt in the spirit. There is no experience on earth to come close to the distress endured by those who reject Christ and go to hell. Be warned. Be warned!

Hell can be escaped. But the only escape is to receive Jesus Christ. Those who trust Him are delivered from condemnation of sin and set free (Romans 5:1; 8:1). To be in Christ is not to be condemned, but to be out of Christ is to be condemned already (John 3:36). Where are you?

God has set before you the way of life and the way of death, the way to heaven and the way to hell. Choose life. Choose heaven. Choose Jesus. Enter the grace He offers you by repentance from sin and personal faith in Jesus. Today!

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1. Why do we refer to heaven but not to hell as "home"?
 2. What is heaven like?
 3. How can you be sure you are going to heaven?
 4. What kind of a place is hell?
 5. Who will be in hell?
 6. How would you compare/contrast heaven and hell?
 7. What kind of suffering is endured in hell?
 8. What is the escape from hell?
 9. How can you get your loved ones to prepare for heaven and escape hell?
 10. How will you put this doctrine into practice this week?