LAW OF GOD

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The law of God as revealed in the Bible is a good, right, and perfect system of eternal directives and principles that reflects God's character and serves as a means of expressing His love toward man. God's law teaches man how to properly worship God, how to love his fellowman, how to live life abundantly, and, at the same time, how to prepare for an eternal spiritual life in the family of God. The law of God is represented in both the Old and the New Testaments and is expressed by both physical actions and spiritual motivations.

John 14:15, 21; Romans 7:12; 1 John 5:2–3, Matthew 5:17–19

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Church of God looks to the whole Bible, both Old and New Testaments, as its fundamental source of doctrine and teachings. We accept Christ's statement that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4). Jesus plainly accepted the authenticity and inspiration of the entire Old Testament with its three major divisions—the Law, the Prophets and the Writings (Lk. 24:44)—as being relevant for the New Testament ministry of the Church of God. In support of this, the apostle Paul wrote: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine" (2 Tim. 3:16). Therefore, the character, personality and specific teachings of Jesus Christ—both as the Rock that went with Israel in the Old Testament (1 Cor. 10:4; Deut. 32:15, 18) and as the Son of man and the Son of God in the New Testament—are the foundations of our biblical understanding of man's relationship to the law of God.

God's law in its fullest, most complete sense is spiritual and could not be discovered or discerned by man without direct revelation from God. The fullness of God's law involves every facet of personal and collective human existence. Though its expression may change as the circumstances change, the eternal spiritual law of God is unchanging and is always the ultimate object of any biblical code of law or instruction expressed in human language. God's laws are all designed to clarify a consummate knowledge and understanding of God and the ultimate purpose of life, and supreme godly love and character.

Divine law is the totality of the means whereby God instructs man how to live most abundantly in this present physical life, and how to most effectively prepare for the future spiritual life in the Kingdom of God.

The New Testament writers clearly express a positive attitude towards God's law as magnified and given spiritual impact and import by Jesus Christ. Jesus stated that "all the law and the prophets"—the entire Old Testament—were based on the overall principles of love toward God and love toward one's fellow man (Mt. 22:36–40). Furthermore, Christ made it very clear He did not come to destroy the law or the prophets (Mt. 5:17). John tells us sin is the transgression of the law (1 Jn. 3:4); and Paul says the law is holy and just and good (Rom. 7:12).

The overall approach to God's law in the New Testament is summed up in the statement, "He that says, I know Him, and keeps not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 Jn. 2:4). However, in fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of magnifying the law and making it honorable (Is. 42:21), Christ instituted certain changes. Christ Himself specifically abrogated certain statements in

the law, in relation to swearing and to marriage, thereby bringing the laws given at Sinai into conformity with the original intent of the commandments upon which they were based. Moreover, Acts 15 makes clear that the law in regard to circumcision—which had antedated the covenant at Sinai was not binding upon gentile Christians. Therefore, based upon this example of God's Church using the power entrusted to it by Christ to make binding decisions (Mt. 16:19), the Church of God recognizes the same administrative responsibilities—based upon New Testament principles and examples—to determine the application of Old Testament laws today.

DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

The term "law" is intrinsic to any systematic study of theology. Yet the English word "law" carries a narrow, legal connotation, which may cause a misunderstanding of biblical terms. A number of words in both the Old and the New Testaments are commonly translated "law" in the major English versions. These words, however, often admit of broader meaning than the normal English usage and do not necessarily have legalistic overtones of their English counterparts (or are otherwise not equivalent).

A thorough study of the Hebrew and Greek terminology in the Bible would be out of place here because of length and technicality, though some of the major terms are briefly discussed later on in this paper. But it might be helpful to illustrate why "law" may not always be a suitable equivalent of the original. An important term in the Old Testament and later Judaism is the well-known Hebrew word *torah*. It may refer to law as a legal system; it may refer to specific regulations and statutes. Yet *torah* is often used in the broad sense of anything considered traditional, customary, and authoritative. Perhaps the best English equivalent is "teachings," though even that may not be broad enough in meaning.

One needs to be careful that one does not assume laws are necessarily categorized by the Hebrew (or English) terms used. There is no consistent terminology for the various types of laws. For example, one might assume a distinction between "statute" and "ordinance" as found in certain translations. However, neither term consistently translates the same Hebrew word. Thus, the Hebrew *hoq* is variously translated as "law," "statute," "ordinance," and "commandment" in the major English versions. The Ten Commandments are never called by the Hebrew term usually translated "commandment" (*miswah*)—they are simply referred to as the ten "words" (*devarim*). As mentioned above, the word *torah* means much more than just the English word "law."

It is also important to note that the term "law of Moses" is itself used interchangeably with the term "law of God." Thus, in Nehemiah 8, the expression alternates between "law of Moses" in verse 1 and "law of God" in verses 8 and 18. The term "law of Moses" is generally used as a designation for the Pentateuch or "Torah." The term "law of Moses" would thus apply to anything in those five books, whether it is the Ten Commandments or the sacrificial laws or circumcision. Such usage is confirmed in the New Testament as, for example, in Luke 24:44.

Thus, the occurrence of "law" in an English translation may imply—depending on the original Hebrew or Greek and the context—"legal system," "regulation," "sacrificial ritual," "Ten Commandments," "principle," "natural law," "the Pentateuch," "customary tradition," "belief," etc. It is therefore impossible to give a simple definition of "law." The concept of "law" in the Bible is complex and cannot be defined or summarized in any brief way without danger of oversimplification. The very complexity of the subject requires the many aspects of the biblical concept of law be discussed. No adequate understanding of the teaching of God's Church on law can be gained without a thorough and careful reading of the entire overview given here. Seldom is an "either/or" position taken. The Church believes in freedom and law, faith and works, love and law, forgiveness and justice, reward and selfless service, grace and law, to name only a few of the traditional dichotomies found in treatments of the subject.

The Bible itself sets the tone for the use of the term "law." Sometimes law is viewed as the only important thing, sometimes as a good thing; at other times it is considered something obsolete, inadequate, or incomplete. Perhaps the epitome of biblical discussion on the subject is found in Paul's writings, yet it is obvious Paul has been frequently misunderstood.

Love is the Fulfillment of the Law

God is love. That is His nature and essence (1 Jn. 4:8). It is only from God that we can learn what real and perfect love is. A great deal depends on the guidance of His Holy Spirit, but God's love is essentially expressed and taught through His law (Rom. 13:10; 1 Jn. 5:3). It is the major vehicle by which His love has been made known to mankind.

If we human beings had the love that God has—perfect, complete and limitless love—we would have no need of any external moral law (though we should still need God to reveal His Sabbath, holy days, spiritual meanings, ceremonial laws, etc.). If human beings had the full knowledge of love plus the full power to express that love God has, there should be no need of external guidelines, codified statements, definitions, or examples of any kind: we would always express love to its full extent. But we are not God, and we do not have the perfect love, which is exemplified in Him. Human beings must learn love. Christians must grow toward that absolute embodiment of love, which all fall so short. This is the purpose of God's law.

How can one know love unless he is taught what it is and how it works? Ultimately, it is learned by practice. Yet before one can practice it, there must be some sort of beginning. The various aspects of God's law in the Bible are designed to give a start to the individual. These aspects then lead him to greater and clearer understanding of this concept until he learns to live by internalized spiritual motivations which, while no longer adequately expressible in human words, compel him to continue to fulfil the objective of God's law which is love at the highest plane.

The concept of love can be epitomized, albeit inadequately, in the following statement: Love is both wholehearted worship toward God and outgoing concern for one's fellow man equal to the natural concern for self. This is seen in Matthew 22, where Jesus says that the great commandment in the law is to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (vv. 36–40).

Here, Jesus states that our love must be first toward God with full fervency, and then toward our neighbour in a manner equal to our love for ourselves. In fact, these two great commandments of God are the very foundation of God's law on which all the law and all the prophets hang. All the biblical books on the law and the prophets teach one, by example as well as by command, how to show love toward his neighbour. Many of the basic principles of loving one's fellow man are well known; the basic principles of love of neighbour have appeared in almost every culture, age, and religion (cf. Rom. 2:14–15).

Yet love of God is a point about which there is considerable difference of opinion. For that reason God gave four basic commands or principles that are the first four of the great Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:3–11). The last six proceed to give basic principles of love of fellow human beings (Ex. 20:12–17). Thus, the two "great commandments" of love of God and love of man are made more specific in the broad precepts of the Ten Commandments (cf. Deut. 5:7–21).

Limited as they are, however, human beings find it difficult to translate broad principles into practical application. Therefore, when God gave the Ten Commandments to ancient Israel—though it is clear they were already known for thousands of years—He did not stop there. He went on to give them more detailed instructions, some of them rather broad, others very minute and detailed, applicable only to a specific situation in a specific time or culture. (These will be discussed later at length.)

It is in the detailed physical regulations that man first finds himself able to grasp what God's law is all about (cf. Jas. 1:22–25). Almost everyone understands the need today for a speed limit or a no-parking sign. Likewise, in ancient Israel, there was little chance for dispute about the need for a parapet surrounding one's roof (Deut. 22:8). These are very tangible regulations, which anyone can come to grips with. It is these detailed instructions—often time or culturally bound—which begin to lead one toward the higher concepts of God's law and hence "love." This is assuming that one obeys them and reflects on their purpose: to teach one how to love God and how to love his fellow man.

The command to build a guardrail around one's roof has variable application in societies today. It would only serve as a bird perch in some areas of

the world. Yet in the society of ancient Israel, as also in certain modern forms of architecture, it was, and is, common to use the roof as living quarters or for other similar purposes. One who did not protect the users of his roof with a guarding parapet was guilty of negligence and, consequently, of not loving his neighbor. One cannot love his neighbour if he does not correct a potential hazard to life and limb.

As the individual regulates his life by these more narrow ordinances, he starts to perceive what it means to think of others. He begins to grasp the meaning of living a life, which shows concern for others and is not just purely egocentric. Suddenly, the minor regulations have significance greater than their specific object or immediate concern. The man who would never think of killing a neighbour in cold blood might accomplish the same act—through unthinking carelessness—by not penning up his berserk bull. The one who caused an innocent person to be condemned by his false testimony would be as guilty of his blood as if he had struck him with a meat cleaver.

The detailed regulations, whether statute, ordinance or judgment (the terminology is of little significance, as already discussed, since the Hebrew terms do not correspond exactly with the English ones) lead to more general precepts. As the individual attempts to apply the more minute instructions and in so doing considers their purpose, he comes to see how they relate to one another and how they incorporate broader concepts. These broader concepts themselves cohere to form the basic structure of love embodied in the Ten Commandments. Through these two major facets unfold love of God and love of man—neither of which can be omitted from the total meaning of love.

At this point, the artificial dilemma regarding the spirit of the law and the letter of the law takes on a different perspective. Ultimately, the love of God can be discerned only through His Spirit. It cannot be expressed in human language in other than inadequate form. This is why knowledge of God's love is conveyed through legal, ethical, and moral regulations. These instructions are not ends in themselves. They point to the true end and provide a means of reaching it. They were not, in their deepest significance, set up as a code by which a person could be adjudged innocent or guilty. They were designed to show the way to love of God and love of man.

Naturally, in any human society that does not understand God's perfect love, some sort of administrative system of reward and punishment is necessary. In the same way, the concept of sin as the breaking of God's law is a New Testament concept, and sin plays an important part in New Testament theology. Yet it is due to the failings of human nature, not because God is simply interested in the law as a means of judging sin. Ultimately, the law points beyond the level of sin, transgression, and living by the letter to the love of God. To fulfil the law to its greatest extent is to have perfect love. Conversely, to have perfect love means to fulfil the law in its most spiritual manifestation.

Law in the Old Testament

The Old Testament is a collection of diverse types of literature. The first five books, which compose the Pentateuch, are often called the "Torah" or "Law." However, the Hebrew term *torah*, as mentioned earlier, means "teachings" rather than just "law" in the legal, codified sense. Further, even though detailed regulations tend to be centered in the Pentateuch, they are not limited to that section of the Old Testament; nor is the Pentateuch simply a law code in the strictest sense.

Some laws in the Old Testament clearly encompass broad principles while others are quite specific, minute regulations. The biblical text does not itself always clearly distinguish between the more important and the less important. That is why one finds many admonitions to meditate on the law (e.g. Ps. 119:97, 99). Thus, even though these were all laws originating with God, some are more permanent and spiritual in nature than are others. (For example, the whole sacrificial system of the tabernacle and temple were important—even vital—for a certain period of time, but the New Testament shows these regulations are not for all men at all times. They served a specific function for a certain time and in a particular place while always symbolically pointing to deeper spiritual truths.)

Old Testament laws can be broken down into various categories:

1) **Broad spiritual principles** that cover various lesser laws and regulations. The Ten Commandments are the primary example, as is

clearly recognized by Old Testament scholars. For example, the seventh commandment—specifically against adultery—is a broad principle regulating human sexual relations. Detailed instructions concerning the types of sexual practices to be avoided are found in Leviticus 18. These latter fall under the category of "civil regulations" (category no. 2 below) but are summarized by the board principle of the seventh commandment.

2) **Civil regulations** for the Israelite theocracy. These cover a number of different types of regulations. The laws about building a parapet around one's roof, cutting down fruit trees while besieging a city, taking the mother bird with her young, inheritance, cities of refuge, covering an open pit, penning up a dangerous bull, leaving the corners and the forgotten sheaf for the poor, and many other instructions had to do with the proper conduct of a physical society within a national state. Since Israel was a theocracy, many of these regulations had religious overtones, even while being primarily civil in function, and often pointed toward the broad principle of the law. To these were added the various decisions made by the judges.

3) **Laws of cleanliness and ritual purity**. These are hard to separate since both are often included under the same instructions. For example, those who touched a dead body had to wash themselves. This is the cleanliness part of the instructions. Yet they also remained "unclean" (Hebrew, *tame*) for a certain length of time (Lev. 11:39–40). Thus, both physical cleanliness and ritual cleanliness are included in the same instructions.

4) **Laws relating to the sacrificial system** and other regulations having to do with the religious liturgy or serving a symbolic or disciplinary function. For example, individuals were to sew blue fringes on their garments as a physical ritual to remind them of God's commandments (Num. 15:37–40). Circumcision was also a religious ceremony of great importance. Whole sections of the Pentateuch (e.g. Lev. 1–10) give detailed instructions about the conduct of the sacrificial system. The sacrifices were, of course, religious in purpose since they had to do with worship and expiation of sin (Lev. 4:26, 35; 5:16).

One can use the analogy of a modern free country to better understand the various levels of Old Testament law. All instructions were part of that law. None were to be slighted or ignored. The breaking of any law brought some sort of penalty on the violator, though the penalties varied in severity. The same is true with the laws within, for example, the United States. The Constitution says nothing about speed limits, property taxes, zoning, or sexual conduct. Rather, laws are broadly laid out and worded to serve as an overall guide for all generations. All other laws—whether national, regional or local—must conform to the principles laid down in the Constitution. These laws themselves vary in importance. Some cover only a certain state or region or city. They may need to be changed according to the time and circumstances. In addition, a certain body of common law has grown up through individual court decisions (cf. the "judgments" of the Old Testament).

Category no. 1 might correspond to a national constitution—such as that of the United States—and cover all men at all times. Category no. 2 might be analogous to national laws passed by national legislators. That is, they may incorporate regulations which have permanent value for various human societies. On the other hand, some regulations, may be culturally bound and require modification or replacement to remain relevant in a changing society. For example, the laws of inheritance were very important for ancient Israel but are less useful today. The seventh-year land sabbath could be applied in a nation under God's government but is difficult for all Christians everywhere to apply in today's society. Another example is the law requiring that a fence or railing be put on roofs (Deut. 22:8). This makes sense in ancient Israel where the flat rooftop was part of the living space of the house, and there was a danger of children or adults falling off of the roof. Applying this "rooftop fence" rule in the United States and Canada (where most homes have peaked roofs to allow the rain and snow to fall off) makes no sense today; however, a fence around a swimming pool, pond, or garden makes perfect sense. The scriptural principle is to watch out for the health and well-being of your family and neighbors. The *principle* of God's law is intact, even when the *circumstances* (different geography, building practices, etc.) have changed. Thus, the specific law sometimes does not fit the changed sit-

uation brought about by the vicissitudes of time and circumstance.

Yet, one should not allow the concept of broad principles to depreciate minute and detailed regulations. It's impossible to run a country on only broad principles of a constitution. Other laws, statutes, and ordinances are also required. Speed limits and obedience to traffic lights might not be the most spiritual or "moral" of laws, but they are nonetheless essential for man in a mechanized society. Such ordinances are the result of applying moral and ethical principles (not running into another automobile does, after all, have ethical consequences); chaos would ensue if they were suddenly stricken from the books. To say a law is of lesser value or more narrow in application than another is not to say it is of no concern or it can be ignored. The same applies to the detailed laws of the Old Testament.

No survey, even a lengthy one, can begin to cover all the examples or details of law in the Old Testament. The basic types of law and their function have been outlined above. Following is a brief historical survey, given to illustrate that outline and to show that law was by no means static during Old Testament times, even during the history of Israel.

The Old Testament, especially the book of Genesis, records the existence of extensive legal principles and legal codes long before the foundation of the nation of Israel. The last hundred years of archaeological discoveries have seen the discovery of legal codes and regulations from various parts of the ancient Near East. Thus, the particular codification given under the Sinai covenant was hardly the giving of law where none had previously existed. In fact, many of the regulations found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers were only a reaffirmation of accepted regulations that were known for centuries.

The account of the Garden of Eden is the first reference on instructions to human beings. Adam and Eve were instructed in the proper use and enjoyment of their idyllic physical surroundings; the one thing expressly forbidden was partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This first simple instruction was given for the good of Adam and Eve; yet they disobeyed and reaped the consequences.

Their sons, Cain and Abel, knew of God and worshipped Him by means of a burnt offering. For a reason not fully specified in the Genesis account, Cain's offering was not acceptable. His jealousy of Abel, whose sacrifice was accepted, produced the first murder. This brief episode shows several important points: worship was permitted through certain ritualistic ceremonies; this worship was regulated by some sort of unwritten code, which Cain violated; Cain knew he was wrong to slay his brother and tried to cover it up; two sins—violations of law—are pointed out: murder and lying. It is therefore impossible to refer to the period before Sinai as a time of no law.

Similarly, the flood of Noah came because "God saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Wickedness and evil are capable of existence only when there is a standard against which they can be judged. That standard does not have to be written down or externally codified; it can be a common understanding to which the term "natural law" or perhaps even "common law" could be applied. The point is that law had to exist before actions could be pronounced good or evil.

Throughout the patriarchal period, various statements are made that evidence at least an implicit code or system of law with grave results for violation and great blessings for obedience. Perhaps the classic capsule statement of the situation is contained in Genesis 26 in a reference to Abraham: "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you; ...and I will fulfill the oath which I swore to Abraham your father...because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (vv. 3–5).

Abraham, Isaac, and their descendants were blessed for obedience to well-known laws and commandments. The fact these are not specifically enumerated does not mean they didn't exist. On the contrary, many of them can be known by the *specific examples* which presuppose them. The following are examples of implicit laws in Genesis. Adultery being punishable: "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us" (26:10); homosexuality being drastically punished (chapter 19); circumcision being a requirement for descendants of Abraham as a sign of God's covenant with him (chapter 17); private property being respected (chapter 23); standard weights being used in business dealings (23:16);

theft being wrong (31:19, 30, 32). Many other examples could be cited.

Therefore, when God brought Israel out of Egypt, it was no new thing for Him to lay down regulations for them. The first command concerned the institution of the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. Between Rameses and Sinai, a number of different commands were given to the Israelites. On Mount Sinai God spoke the Ten Commandments Himself and wrote them on two tables of stone. These two symbolic acts showed the Ten Commandments were to be considered more fundamental than the other laws. (The Sinaitic covenant included a number of laws besides the Decalogue, Ex. 20–24).

Later, other regulations were added. A significant number of these centered on the sacrificial system at the altar. Sacrifices were not new; they had been offered at least since the time of Cain and Abel. What were new were the many specific laws about the conduct of the ritual worship. Yet we find, with the introduction of the temple at Jerusalem centuries later, many of these rules were modified. In fact the rules about building altars in Exodus 20:24–26 were soon changed and no altars except the one associated with the Tabernacle were allowed (Deut. 12). Deuteronomy covers many of the same basic regulations found in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers but often modifies them or adapts them to new situations. So it is that in the Pentateuch itself we see a development of the legal code. A change in the administration or environment often changes the interpretation and application of the law without altering the underlying principle. Rules given at one time for one situation were already being modified because of new situations (such as the change from nomadic desert-dwelling, in Exodus, to an established agricultural lifestyle and culture in the land of Canaan, in Deuteronomy). Thus, God's Word establishes from its beginning the responsibility of God's people to apply His laws to their changing contemporary situations.

Some of the laws arising with Israel were already known in the same or a similar form elsewhere in the ancient Near East, as the book of Genesis and the literature of other ancient peoples show. A code of law was accepted as in any functioning national state today. Even where the word of the monarch was law, a common system of conduct for the average citizen was still very much in evidence. After all, the king could not judge every single case or decide every little matter in the day-to-day life of even a small city-state, much less a huge empire.

It is true that a number of laws in the Old Testament can seem somewhat less than ideal from our modern viewpoint. They sound strange, indeed "primitive," to our modem ears. For example, slavery is only regulated, polygamy is allowed, and women have decidedly inferior position. However, when the instructions dealing with these subjects are viewed against their background in the ancient Near East, many of them are remarkably progressive. That is, they would have been considered extremely liberal, even radical, for that time. These laws appear to have been instituted for the regulation and mollification of previously existing customs. Whether the customs themselves were good or bad was not the point. Rather, since eradication of the bad was impossible, God gave laws to ameliorate the existing situation.

Such accepted institutions as slavery were regulated to help protect the indentured servant and the bond slave. Polygamy was normal for the time, yet the laws of the Pentateuch saw to it that at least inheritance laws should be conducted fairly. Scripture directs a death penalty for the rape of a woman who is engaged or married (Deut. 22:25). In the case of an unmarried woman, the law is insightful. In case of consensual premarital sex (Ex. 22:16–17) or in the case of rape (Deut. 22:28–29), the man normally had to marry the woman, to protect her, since she would have had a hard time finding a husband. In the culture of the day, a woman who lost her virginity would be seen as undesirable for marriage and would likely suffer as a social outcast in a life of poverty. At that time, the law was not seen as "letting a man or rapist off easy" or forcing a woman into a horrible marriage; it was securing the future of the woman and her children. Of course, if the character of the rapist was clearly depraved—that is, if his crime was not an isolated example of lust getting the better of him but evidence of a basic flaw of character—the father of the victim could still disallow it (Ex. 22:16–17). From our modem point of view, the law may look peculiar. For the society at that time, it was a means designed to make the best of a bad situation. Similarly, just because God gave specific laws regarding divorce, it did not mean He approved the practice (cf. Mt. 19:8). God was simply eliminating the possibility of continuous wife swapping (Deut.

24:1–4).

These examples are again evidence of a progression in the revelation of understanding of God's ultimate spiritual law. Even in the New Testament the institution of slavery is nowhere condemned outright. Some people assert that "the Bible says" that slavery is "allowed," or that polygamy is "allowed"—and at a surface level they have a point. But passages acknowledging the existence of these practices do not mean that God endorsed them. To return to the subject of divorce, Jesus said, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Mt. 19:8) He is saying that it was never God's intent that a marriage ever be broken up, and that the permission Moses gave was not an endorsement but was due to the existence of an unfortunate situation.

When we examine a subject such as slavery, we may have a mental picture of the misery, hardship, and unfairness of this practice. *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* points out, "Slavery in the biblical world was complex and normally very different than the slavery of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western world.... Inhumane treatment by masters was grounds for release [Ex. 21:7–11; Ex. 21:26–27; Deut. 21:14]. It is not abolished but regulated in Israel. The legal codes for that regulation include Exod 21, Lev 25, and Deut 15." It is unfortunate that the "indentured servitude" existing in Israel is assumed to contain the violence and cruelty associated with slavery. Yet, does any slavery (or involuntary servitude) show love to God or fellowman? We can reason, using biblical principles, that slavery—*although listed in the Bible*—is not God's will for any man, as we are all created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). God invites us to go beyond a surface reading of the Bible to seek to understand His will and His mind with the invitation, "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18).

A look at law in the Old Testament would not be complete without examining certain prophetic Old Testament passages that indicate the reinstitution of a temple and regular sacrificial system during the Messiah's—Christ's—reign in the Millennium (Is. 66:20–23; Ezek. 40–48; Zech. 14:20–21; Mal. 3:1–4; etc.). Why should such physical rituals have a place when Christ Himself is ruling?

Scripture does not explicitly answer, but we can speculate about why God would restore a temple and sacrificial system. First, in addition to allowing Jerusalem to serve as a religious center, such a system would enable a restored Israel to serve as an example to the world. The priesthood, which in times past did not consistently execute its duties with the proper care and willingness, would now show the world how those duties should be carried out (Ezek. 44:5 ff). Israel as a physical modelled nation shall also have an important part in setting the social, ethical, and religious examples.

A second reason is somewhat similar. Christ shall have established His rule over physical, unconverted nations. They must be led gradually to the place of repenting, being converted, and receiving the Holy Spirit. Just as the temple ritual was important to the ancient Israelites without God's Spirit, so the reestablished ritual of sacrifices shall give them a physical means of growing intellectually towards a spiritual understanding of God. The necessary education shall take a good deal of time. The temple shall serve as an important part—the center—of religious education.

Thirdly and finally, just as the sacrifices of ancient Israel pointed *forward* to a coming Savior who paid the supreme sacrifice for the sins of the world, so in the Millennium the sacrifices will point *back* to that sacrificial event and give people a greater understanding and appreciation of Christ our Savior (in much the same way as the Passover service does today), the consequences of sin, and the meaning of salvation.

Law in the New Testament

The importance of law in the Old Testament is easily accepted even though its exact implications may be debated. It is the subject of God's law in the New Testament that has been much misunderstood. The question affects not only the totality of the Christian life but also how the New Testament—and its relationship with the Old Testament—is understood. It would be out of place in this section to attempt to take up the entire New Testament teachings on conversion, salvation, morality, conduct, and so on. (Many of these points are discussed in detail under other major headings.) Therefore we will concentrate on the contextual background in New Testament times, the reason why certain new approaches to law are emphasized, and why some

contrasts are made with the Old Testament position.

The picture of Judaism in the first century is only now becoming clear as a result of recent scholarship, while many old assumptions (unfortunately widespread in many of the major reference works) are no longer tenable. The reconstruction of early first-century Judaism that emerges from new methods and documents is quite different from that of Judaism after the period A.D. 70–135.

The Judaism of New Testament times was rooted in the Old Testament. The Hebrew Bible was the major traditional literature (even if read only in Greek translation as it was by many in the diaspora). The religious center was the temple and its sacrificial system. There were also many different popular preachers and religious sects of diverse persuasions. However, actual membership in the sects was quite small. The vast majority of Jews were not members of any sect and were not overly scrupulous or religious in conduct. That is, despite a general piety which undoubtedly characterized most of them, they were too busy making a living to devote their time to sectarian taboos, religious harangues, or denominational disputes.

This does not mean that certain of the sectarian leaders and teachers were not looked upon with a certain respect or the temple worship was neglected. But the picture of a populace dominated by strictly-observed pharisaic rules of purity and *halakah* is not accurate. This is not to say that the Pharisees did not have considerable prestige or that they were without influence. On the other hand, there were only a few thousand Pharisees, and their rules and opinions were not dutifully followed by the people and were emphatically not followed by most of the temple priests.

Yet we must also keep in mind the previous centuries of Jewish history. The destruction of Jerusalem and the exile in 587 B.C. were very traumatic experiences. With the return of the exiles, there was a determination not to repeat the original causes of that exile. One of the major causes was considered to be Sabbath-breaking (Neh. 13:16–18; Ezek. 20:24). In the centuries that followed, the Jewish faith had its ups and downs. The one episode, which threatened to submerge Judaism entirely, came in the middle of the second century B.C. The Seleucid king, Athiochus IV Epiphanes, waged war against Judea, allying with the renegade Jews, defiling the temple and stopping the temple service.

At this time the Jews waged a long war to preserve their religion and autonomy. Although Jerusalem was retaken and the temple services restored after three years, the Maccabean state continued to fight with the Syrians for decades. The priesthood was combined with the political leadership in the Hasmonean (Maccabean) dynasty, which ruled Judea for the next century. This autonomy came to an end in 63 B.C. when Rome intervened in civil strife resulting from rival claims to the high priesthood.

Nevertheless, under Roman rule, with the Herodian family as the major figure of political control, the Jewish state still maintained a considerable amount of freedom. Not only was worship not restricted but Herod the Great even began a lengthy process of beautification and restoration of the temple. Objections to Rome were primarily of a political and not of a religious nature. The Jewish religion was a thriving concern. The main thing to remember is Judaism was a pluralistic phenomenon of many differing aspects with the temple as its focus; it was not a pharisaic or rabbinic monopoly.

It was onto this stage that Jesus stepped—the stage on which He began His teachings. It was on this same stage that the early Church began. The apostle Paul concentrated his efforts in the diaspora. The Jews in the diaspora, despite some differences, seemed to cover the same basic religious spectrum as the Jews in Palestine. As a people and as a religion, the Jews and Judaism were very well known in the first century throughout the Roman Empire. This is borne out by many historians of the period. Preaching the gospel in the gentile world meant building upon a Jewish—and hence Old Testament—foundation.

The New Testament teachings presume the Old Testament and the Judaism of that time. This is clear to anyone who studies the historical and cultural background as well as the New Testament itself. Thus, what sometimes appears to be a radical statement about Judaism or the law or Old Testament, is really a spiritual modification or an amplification or both, rather than a rejection or repudiation. In other words, the New Testament writers—including Paul—did not reject the Old Testament or the law or even their Jewish background. They rejected a few things and modified or changed the emphasis of many things, and they

especially taught the newly-revealed spiritual meanings involved. *It is critical for a full understanding of God's law in the New Testament to realize that the apostles assumed a great deal as intuitively and publicly obvious, without seeing any need to discuss it specifically* (i.e. clean and unclean meats, polygamy, tithing, holy days, Sabbath-keeping, homosexuality, etc.).

To take one example—perhaps the heart of the New Testament—we can look at the "Sermon on the Mount." Much within this vital section is not new; that is, it can be paralleled with sections in the Old Testament. The Old Testament law is presupposed: "Think not that I have come to abolish them but to fulfil them.... Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great" (Mt. 5:17–20).

What is revolutionary about the "Sermon on the Mount" is its complete emphasis on matters of the heart rather than just on external practice. Here is the ultimate in the complete rejection of egotism—the highest form of absolute concern for others and for God. Many Old Testament commands are made more strict by becoming matters of the spirit: sexual desire, divorce, repayment for wrongs, swearing, murder, and hate, to name some of the major ones. Jesus was making things harder, not easier. As the disciples said about the subject of divorce in another context, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry." Jesus' answer was that "Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given" (Mt. 19:10–11).

Jesus was not doing away with the law; He was, rather, magnifying and lifting it to a spiritual plane, revealing its full spiritual intent. He was making it a matter of the spirit rather than only of the letter. He was showing the law's intent and purpose as opposed to its bare physical statement. The basic overall result was the introduction of a system of law that could be kept only by means of the Holy Spirit. Old Testament laws could be kept in the letter by any ordinary physical individual with character and self-discipline. New Testament law in its spiritual form could in no way be kept without divine help.

In the Old Testament, righteousness was primarily judged by what one did, by external conformity to the laws. This does not mean that there are not many statements about the attitude and intent of the heart and its importance—there are. But the emphasis is nonetheless on adherence to the letter of the law, something that was possible for the ordinary person. The New Testament goes much further, stating that external obedience is not enough. Despite one's attempts, full service to the spiritual demands of the law is unattainable in the flesh. No one can be completely righteous without perfect obedience. Since this is impossible, no one is, by himself, righteous.

This view was, of course, quite contrary to the then current view of things. To persons such as the Pharisees who put great emphasis on their scrupulous observance of their own ritual laws of purity, it was rather galling to be told their faithful practice was so much dung (cf. Phil. 3:8). Paul is not castigating obedience; he is not denigrating the Old Testament law. Rather, he is showing the real source of forgiveness and salvation is Jesus Christ—that His sacrifice for our sins and His resurrection are the really important things as opposed to the less important do's and don'ts of the law.

And this is often misunderstood simply because Paul's teachings are not understood against this background. He himself strictly conformed even to what were considered ritual observances (Acts 16:3; 18:18; 21:17–26). On the other hand, some things, which are often relegated to the level of ritual, were not ritual but essential parts of worship, which Paul observed and taught. (For examples, see Sabbath and Annual Holy Days.)

Furthermore, Paul was teaching not just Jews but gentiles. The Old Testament promises were mostly physical, made to a physical Israel that did not understand the spiritual intent of circumcision, even though Old Testament writings speak of an inward circumcision not of the flesh (Jer. 4:4; Deut. 30:6; Joel 2:13). The requirement of physical circumcision for males was a major problem in the early Church, with the decision being made that such circumcision was not for the gentiles. The message Paul took to the gentiles was that they no longer needed to become Jews outwardly, in the flesh through circumcision, to gain salvation. Membership in the Israel of God was a matter of the heart.

Paul's epistle to the Romans is replete with vigorous statements in full support of the law. The law is not void by faith, but fully established (Rom. 3:31).

Christians are admonished not to continue in sin (Rom. 6:1–2), but to become "servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:18). The law is good (Rom. 7:7); it is spiritual (Rom. 7:14) and "holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 12). The carnal mind that leads to death (Rom. 6:23; 8:6) is defined as being "enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God" (Rom. 8:7).

Paul's statement in Romans 2:25–27, while often quoted, has been somewhat neglected as a powerful affirmation of the fact that gentiles need to be "law-keepers." In this passage Paul is showing that the issue of circumcision is irrelevant for the Christian, in contradistinction to the issue of keeping "the righteousness of the law," which is extremely relevant. If the uncircumcised gentiles fulfill the law, they are immeasurably superior to circumcised Jews who transgress the law. So a gentile in the Church who keeps the law becomes a true Jew inwardly, because he is fulfilling what God wanted all along. The condition is *to keep God's law*. Paul's use of the term "law" cannot mean the entire Sinaitic covenant, since circumcision itself was a part of that covenant and therefore it would be logically impossible for an uncircumcised person to keep the "whole" law. Paul must be referring to the moral law, the Ten Commandments, in Romans 2:25–27.

Paul knew some would conclude he was teaching the law was annulled or worthless because he continually stressed salvation cannot be earned by law-keeping. "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31). This is important because, if the law were done away or became invalid, then sin would be dead (Rom. 7:8), no transgression would exist (Rom. 4:15), and God could not impute sin to make the sacrifice of Christ meaningful. "The strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor. 15:56): the law is the standard for defining sin and righteousness. If that standard is removed, there is no need for Christ. So by accepting Jesus, the true Christian is indeed establishing the law, by admitting its full empowerment in condemning him (Rom. 6:23). As a result, the true Christian, with the help of the Holy Spirit, can fulfill the righteousness of the law (Rom. 8:4) and with Paul shall "*delight* in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22).

The book of Galatians is often used as support in an attempt to do away with God's law. This is not the issue dealt with in the epistle at all. The focal point of Paul's letter to the Galatians does not deal with the abrogation of the law but rather with the question of how one is justified. Justification means forgiveness for past sins—being counted as just and pure through Jesus' blood. That is what Paul is dealing with. In other words, there are two systems. One began with the covenant at Sinai. The other is the system of faith in Christ. The one system, of relying on the fact that you are circumcised, etc. for justification does not lead to eternal life. Paul shows that this only condemns—brings bondage—because no provision exists for real forgiveness and pardon for sin. So the system of the first covenant will not save anyone. Some were denying that to the Galatian Church. They were looking to their physical adherence— to the way of life of the Sinaitic covenant, especially to circumcision—to earn them salvation.

But the question was not whether Gentiles could covet, kill, steal, or break the Sabbath. Rather, the question was whether a gentile had to be physically circumcised (Gal. 2:3–4). Paul categorically denied this. Galatians 2:14 expands the problem further: the Jews were even practicing racial discrimination for religious reasons. They felt superior to their gentile brethren because they were physically a part of the heritage of Israel. But Paul showed in Romans that this should only have made them see their sins more, since they knew God's law so well. So the question has to do with circumcision and the manner or customs that one follows. Why, then, is Paul so upset over this? Because carried to their logical conclusion these requirements would mean Jesus' death was not necessary. If being a Jew could save a man, if being physically circumcised could bring favor with God, then Christ died in vain. It would mean that just having the law would be enough. But having the law—having the whole system of the Sinaitic covenant—was *not* enough to attain eternal life; in fact, it only pointed out sin more clearly. To rely fully on the law, one would have to keep all of it perfectly, which is impossible. So when Paul uses "law" in Galatians he means all that is involved in being a Jew—the whole system of the Sinaitic covenant—and he specifically singles out circumcision as an issue.

Justification must be by faith (Gal. 3:11). The law of the Sinaitic covenant was not given to provide justification or as a method for salvation (Gal 3:21). In addition to the *educative role of the law*—

showing mankind the best way to live (Rom. 7:12, 22)—Paul in Galatians describes the law as a schoolmaster or "pedagogue" (Gal 3:24) to teach us the meaning of obedience and bring us to Christ through showing us that we are sinners in need of a Savior.

This, then, is the core of Galatians. Much of Paul's reasoning is the same in Romans as in Galatians. But in Romans, Paul is dealing with moral law—sin and grace—whereas in Galatians, the problem is circumcision and understanding the place of the Sinaitic covenant, the whole system called "law." But the same conclusions are arrived at by complementary arguments.

In Romans, Paul uses the law of God concerning coveting (Rom. 7:7ff) as an example. Why cannot that law save us? Because it only emphasizes the sin. If we rely on works of the law—our keeping of this law—we will fail. We are sinners and have all coveted. The only solution is justification by faith. But after justification we must keep the law through God's Spirit. The law is holy, just, and good; it is spiritual and eternal.

In Galatians, Paul deals with the law of circumcision. We cannot be saved by circumcision because that *whole system* of law, which circumcision is a part of, provides no grace or pardon, only condemnation. We cannot, with our natural human strength, always keep the law (i.e. the Ten Commandments; we *can* keep circumcision—it is painful, but doable). So the only solution is Jesus and justification by faith. But what about after justification? Are we then to follow circumcision and the system of the Sinaitic covenant? No, that would be to deny Jesus and our need for Him.

Once again, the reasoning in Romans and Galatians is basically the same, but the issues are different. The first is universal—the question of sin and morality. The second is the question of the historical place of the Sinai covenant in God's plan. Remember that the Ten Commandments did not originate with the Sinaitic covenant but with God at Creation. So they are not affected when the covenant is changed. They are universal and tell us what sin is.

Ephesians 6:1–3 is a very significant statement concerning the position of the Ten Commandments in the gentile churches. Here the fifth one is cited. Notice the comment in verse 2. It *is* "the first commandment with promise." Not just that it *was*—it still is. And what does Paul mean by "the first"? He is obviously referring to a set of commandments—a group of them. And they still apply. This simple statement by Paul gives us an important insight into the attitude of the gentile churches towards the Ten Commandments. He does not have to introduce them or say that "Honor your father and mother" *was* once a commandment with promise—for it *is* a commandment at this time.

If gentile Christians were indeed taught to honor and keep the Ten Commandments, why, then, does Paul make certain mitigating comments about "law"? The answer is rooted in the historical reality that Christianity at this time was viewed as a Jewish sect in the general public opinion. Therefore, *much of what has been taken as a castigation of the Old Testament law in the New Testament is actually an antidote to the idea that gentiles had to become Jewish proselytes before they could become Christians*. This idea probably gained credence simply because gentile Christians were taught and read their Old Testament, and various proselytizing Jewish groups were spreading the message that gentiles had to follow the whole system of first-century Judaism in order to partake of the salvation now offered by the God of Israel through Jesus Christ. Certainly to gentiles that had never heretofore been taught the Holy Scriptures, apostolic Christianity and contemporary Judaism must have seemed extremely similar (much as Methodism and Seventh-Day Adventism might seem similar to a Buddhist today). Paul therefore had to take great pains to show how Christianity *differed* from Judaism. *He had to do this because the two religions clearly had so much in common*.

Nearly everybody knew what Judaism and the Old Testament taught. The Sabbath and annual Holy Days, for example, were commonly known. What Paul had to do was not reemphasize the Old Testament laws already known, but rather teach the new revelations about Jesus Christ and His spiritual magnification of the law that *nobody* knew.

No attempt was made by the New Testament writers to repeat everything of relevance in the Old Testament. To do so would have made the Old Testament redundant. It would also have been utterly ridiculous, since the Old Testament was commonly presupposed to be inspired Scripture, the Word of God. It was the only Scripture then in existence.

Converts from paganism were, of course, tempted to revert to the religious culture from which they had come. Various popular religions, syncretistic cults, and astrological clans influenced them. But the contrast between Christianity and paganism was fairly clear. What was not so clear was the difference between Judaism and Christianity. Thus, even though Paul has to fight the influences of paganism and the contemporary culture, he seems to have found many problems from the Jewish side as well. It would appear that some sort of Jewish syncretistic group was instigating the problems he was addressing. (For example, a Jewish syncretistic astrological group may have been behind the problem in Colossae. In other cases, it was probably the basic Hellenistic Jewish mission to the gentiles that upset the various churches.)

When this is understood, most of the presumed antinomian, anti-Jewish, and anti-Old Testament sentiment in Paul's writings evaporates. Despite some differences of his specific mission to the gentiles, Paul suddenly looks a great deal like James and Peter and John in teaching what Jesus taught. Paul was no longer a Pharisee, but he remained a faithful Jew as well as becoming a Christian.

The book of James has been a perennial problem for those who would have the New Testament discard God's law. James calls the law of God "the royal law" in 2:8. He quotes Leviticus 19:18: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," which is the epitome of the last six of the Ten Commandments (Rom. 13:9–10). James goes on to show if you break one point of the law—any one of the Ten Commandments—you are guilty of all (Jas. 2:10–11). God's law is at the same time the "law of liberty" (2:12), since it frees man from the bondage of sin.

But it is the last half of the second chapter of James, verses 14 to 26, that gives antinomian Christians their biggest problem. James repeatedly emphasizes "faith without works is dead" (vv. 17, 20, 26), that the best way to show real faith is by works (v. 18), that by works faith is made perfect (v. 22), and "that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (v. 24). James 4:11–12 is a proper conclusion to this theme, putting the question directly to any who would do away with God's law: "if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge."

In the epistles of John, the subject of keeping the commandments comes up several times. First John 2:4 is direct: "He that says, I know Him, and keeps not His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him." First John 3:4 is powerful in its blunt assertion that "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." Likewise, John 15:10 (cf. 1 Jn. 3:22–24), where Jesus tells His disciples before His death to keep His commandments as He had kept His Father's commandments.

Certainly these commandments included all of Christ's commandments, but the expression clearly includes the only *set* of commandments, the Ten Commandments. Compare Matthew 19:16–19 in this context. Here Jesus tells a rich young man, "if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." The young man asks, "Which?" And Jesus responds by enumerating five of the Ten Commandments.

The necessity to keep God's commandments is reemphasized in the book of Revelation. The Church—"the rest of [the woman's] offspring"—is identified as keeping the commandments of God in Revelation 12:17. The saints are defined as those "who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" in Revelation 14:12. And finally, those who shall be in the incomprehensibly awesome new heaven and new earth of chapter 2l shall be only those who "do His commandments."

All the New Testament writers presuppose the Old Testament and often quote or allude to it. It was decades after the founding of the Church before Holy Scripture comprised more than the Old Testament. Furthermore, since Jesus Christ was the One who had given His law to humanity in general and to Israel in particular at Sinai (see Jesus Christ), He would scarcely have discarded—and He did not discard—in the New Testament the very law He had established in the Old.

The Old Testament is an essential part of the biblical canon. It is as much the Word of God as the New Testament. However, to New Testament Christians, the Old Testament has a special status in that it is not to be taken alone: it must be read in the light of the New Testament.

Law and Grace

Much of the misunderstanding regarding whether a Christian must keep the biblical law (i.e. the Ten Commandments) revolves around the term "grace."

Those who do not think a Christian "must" obey the law conclude since we are under grace" (Rom. 6:15), it's no longer a "must" to keep the law. Those who follow this line of reasoning point to various scriptures—especially those in the book of Galatians (some of which have already been mentioned)—to support their case. They maintain that Christ came to free us from "the curse of the law," or that "Christ is the end of the law" (Rom. 7:4). But Jude describes this line of reasoning as "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness [lawlessness]" (Jude 4).

This approach also illustrates a basic lack of understanding of the word "grace." "Grace," in its biblical meaning and intent, means "the favor, forgiveness, beneficence, generosity, mercy, kindness and compassion of God." Therefore, to be "under grace" means to live within this whole sphere of God's favor and compassion. The two greatest *acts* of grace are 1) forgiveness of past sins, which God grants upon true repentance, faith and baptism, and 2) the unmerited freely-given gift of eternal life, which God grants upon the condition of faith. Hence, to be "under grace" means that one's sins have been forgiven, that he is in a favored position with God, and he is an heir of salvation.

But the Bible nowhere equates "grace" with freedom to disobey God. On the contrary, the exact opposite is stated: "Do we then make void the law through faith? [i.e. do we negate the necessity of keeping the law because we are under grace as a result of faith?] God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31). We, as Christians, "establish the law" because when we accept God's grace through baptism we are acknowledging the existence of law against which we have sinned.

The true relationship between law and grace may be simply stated. Law defines sin because sin is the transgression of the law (1 Jn. 3:4). God's forgiveness of our sins is an act of grace. But this act of grace—this act of unmerited pardon and favor in God's eyes, along with the eventual entrance into God's Kingdom that shall follow if we are faithful—in no way grants us a license or permission to continue to sin. In like manner, a convicted criminal who has been pardoned or has had his sentence commuted by a judge is shown an act of grace, but is not permitted to go out and repeat his crime. Again, far from doing away with the law, grace establishes the law, because one who accepts grace acknowledges the law has been broken. *Without law there can be no grace; therefore grace can never do away with law*.

The purposes of the law are not to provide a means of earning forgiveness and salvation. Salvation cannot be earned. It comes by God's free gift—salvation is by grace alone (Rom. 3:21–24; 5:15–16). Faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the only requirement for this gift of grace. Keeping the law even in the most spiritual manner cannot and does not earn salvation. The central message of the New Testament is that salvation is a gift of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Yet this by no means negates the importance of law in the process of salvation. While salvation is in the final analysis a free gift, God will not give that gift to one who is not willing to submit to Him. Gifts are not given to the unappreciative, and lack of appreciation is indicated in many ways, including a basic contempt for God's laws or a lack of any enthusiasm in trying to see how God's laws reflect His mind (1 Jn. 2:4). Note again the well-known case of the young rich man who approached Jesus about the very subject of salvation in Matthew 19, as quoted above. When Jesus replied, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (v. 17), He was not describing the method of salvation, but rather the prerequisite for His free gift.

The Jews in the time of the New Testament understood the importance of the law and the many promises about blessings for observing it. The problem was that many went on to assume that salvation came by observing it. When Paul and other writers showed them this assumption was incorrect, it became a major stumbling block. Even after the Church had been in existence for almost 20 years, it was still necessary to call a conference over the question of circumcision, since some still believed salvation was impossible without it (Acts 15). Paul had a deep and abiding appreciation for the law (Rom. 6; 7:12; 1 Cor. 7:19), yet he also understood law-keeping did not earn salvation.

The New Testament makes it clear that sin brings on the death penalty (Rom. 6:23). And "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 Jn. 3:4). Since all have sinned and thus failed to keep the law perfectly (Rom. 3:23), all have brought the death penalty upon themselves. Only the giving up of human life will satisfy this penalty. Thus, the sacrifice of the Creator—of God Himself, in the person of Jesus

Christ—is the only means by which that penalty can be paid and thereby removed from all humanity. No one (apart from Jesus) has kept the law perfectly; all have incurred the death penalty. This made the death of sinless Jesus, the Son of God, a necessity. Recognition of Christ's freely given sacrifice not only brings home the sober reality of sin but also enables us to see what true love is at first hand (Jn. 3:16).

The enormous importance of the law of God and man's living *within* it can be measured by considering this immeasurable *price* that God has put on the conditions for the forgiveness of sins—repentance and recognition and acceptance of Jesus Christ's death as payment for our transgressions of His laws. This certainly reflects God's love towards mankind, and can begin to motivate man to express his love back to God by *wanting* to live within God's laws.

God expects Christians to repent of sin (Acts 2:38). But repentance alone does not remove the death penalty. Once one turns from his sinful way of life in wholehearted repentance, God accepts his repentance and Christ offers His own sacrifice on the cross as payment for the death penalty previously incurred by that repentant sinner. The Holy Spirit is promised to the repentant individual as a free gift, which makes possible salvation and eternal life. Even one who is converted will still sin out of weakness. However, he can call on the sacrifice of Christ and gain forgiveness. It is the direction of his life that God is concerned with; God does not keep a tally, as it were, ready to send the individual straight to eternal death if he dies with a single sin he did not repent of on his record. Far from being some sort of "Almighty Bookkeeper," God *wants* to see His children receive salvation. He is very happy to forgive His begotten children who continually find themselves in trouble, so long as their hearts and attitudes are right—so long as they are wholeheartedly sincere and making progress despite weaknesses and setbacks.

Thus, the fight against sin is a very important component of the plan of salvation. Sin is horrible and heinous. Yet one can become so preoccupied with sin as to miss the point of the law in the first place. He can be so concerned about making a mistake that he never steps out and does good. Some people so concentrate on their "sinful wretchedness" they never climb out of the mire and exercise their positive spiritual talents, as they should. Sin is important, but recognition of our sinful natures should not discourage or cause us to not make positive progress through faith.

New Testament Application of Old Testament Laws

Both the Old and New Testaments form the written Word of God. The Old Testament is no less the Word of God than is the New. It would completely miss the point of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments to require everything from the former to be repeated in the latter in order to be considered relevant for Christian behavior. (Bestiality can be used as an extreme and ludicrous example to make the point.) Conversely, it would be equally illogical to attempt to enforce in the secular states of the twentieth century every exact regulation given to the theocracy of Israel over 3,000 years ago.

Christians read the Old Testament in the light of the New, and the New Testament does make some changes. The teachings of the Old Testament may also be understood in the light of the changed circumstances of the Church in the modern world. The Hebrew Bible was written initially to a congregation or church organized as a special nation in the culture and society of the ancient Near East. By the time of the first century, circumstances had changed to some extent. Furthermore, the full revelation of God's plan with the concept of a spiritual Israel required the modification of certain Old Testament teachings in their implementation within a physical nation. This modification process continues today.

The Church has the responsibility of making judgments on the basis of biblical principles. New situations arise not directly addressed in the pages of the Bible. The modern world is not the ancient world. Without the flexibility of making judgments and applying earlier laws to fit newer situations, the Church would become anachronistic and ineffectual. It may be necessary to look at the environment in which the Old Testament laws were given—the society, culture, national situation, contemporary legal attitudes, literary influences, and so forth—in order to understand the reason why a law was initially given to Israel. But to understand the intent behind the law, we must examine the lives and teachings of Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets. Once the *purpose* and *intent of each law* is discerned, its application to modern life becomes

much clearer and obvious. (It is interesting and instructive to realize that though the principles underlying God's laws are immutable and unchangeable, the specific applications of the laws have changed in every period of biblical history.)

The following sections examine certain laws of the Old Testament and show how the Church has applied these today. It has not been possible to cover all the individual laws by any means, but the general principles used should be basically clear. Of course, some of these laws have been clearly modified in the New Testament. In other cases, the New Testament is silent on the subject, and the Church has made decisions based on the Old Testament alone. (Note that Sabbath, Annual Holy Days and Tithing and Giving are covered under those titles.)

Circumcision: One of the laws regarding which the Old Testament is very clear is that of circumcision. Circumcision was instituted as a sign of the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17). It was a sign of the covenant with God and of the Israelites' national identity. It made the new-born boy a part of the community. It was, in a sense, an initiation rite since any male of whatever age was required to undergo it to become part of Israel. Therefore, it is not surprising that circumcision became an important issue in the early Church (Acts 10–11; 15).

Jesus made a clear statement about the permanence of the law, when he said, "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18). Since *heaven and earth have not passed away*, we understand our teaching on the law must be consistent with Jesus' words. We have also seen how that application of a specific law may change over time, while the intent (or spirit) of the law remains. With this in mind, we see how the New Testament church handled the subject of circumcision. The Church leaders did *not* strike circumcision from the law; however, they made it clear that Christians do not consider physical circumcision as a requirement for entry into the spiritual community of Israel, the Church. Their reasoning concluded the only circumcision required is spiritual circumcision of the heart and mind. We benefit today because this question has already been debated and settled in the early Church (Acts 10–11; 15; Gal. 5:2–12). While one could voluntarily undergo circumcision, it was not a requirement for membership in the body of Christ. To reiterate, the only required circumcision is spiritual circumcision—circumcision of the heart and mind.

Nevertheless, this does not mean the Church rejected all physical rituals. Baptism was taught as a physical ceremony. The symbolism of baptism is that of death followed by a resurrection to a new life. It is a voluntary act requiring active, conscious repentance on the part of the mature individual, whereas circumcision is an involuntary act carried out on the unknowing babe in arms.

The Sacrificial System and Temple Ritual: The New Testament has a clear teaching about the temple ritual, just as it does about circumcision. As long as the temple was standing, it was certainly not deprecated. On occasion Christians actually offered up sacrifices (Acts 18:18; 21:23–26). However, the death of Christ was the supreme sacrifice, of which animal sacrifices were only a type (Heb. 10:1–18). The Old Testament system was rendered unnecessary by Christ's sacrifice. Christians look to this rather than merely to the "shadow" which represented it. Furthermore, Christians offer up, not only their possessions (livestock and grain stuffs), but their very selves to God by presenting themselves as *living* sacrifices (Rom. 12:1–2).

Many of the laws in the Old Testament were specifically designed for a physical people who did not have the help of God's Holy Spirit and lived in a national state. The whole sacrificial system was an extremely regulated and detailed physical ritual. It required many animals on a continual basis to keep it going. With these many sacrifices, the person offering the animal was actually able to eat most of it along with his family. Only certain parts were burned on the altar and certain pieces went to the priest. But sin offerings were burned whole and neither the person offering nor the priest realized anything from them. It effectively hurt one's pocketbook to sin!

The principle of sacrifice has certainly not been eliminated for New Testament Christians. However, the sin offering we look to is not an animal offered at the temple altar: it is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. His death rendered the physical sacrificial system unnecessary for converted Christians. This system pointed to Christ. Christians can now view the sacrificial system with greater understanding than could the ancient Israelites who participated in it (Heb. 9–10).

This does not mean the temple worship was

wrong or even bad. The book of Acts shows that the apostle Paul himself participated in the sacrificial system on at least two occasions. He took certain vows that could be completed only by offering an offering in the temple (Acts 18:18; 21:20–26 and cf. Num. 6:18). It was not wrong for Israelite Christians to continue participating in the sacrificial system; it was simply unnecessary. Of course, once the temple and Jerusalem were destroyed, it became impossible for them, as for all Jews, to continue sacrificing.

Clean and Unclean Animals: Many regulations in Leviticus have to do with being "clean" (Hebrew *tahor*) or "unclean" (Hebrew *tame*). These regulations had two functions: (1) They usually required washing, which served as a physical cleansing agent and helped prevent the contraction or spread of disease; (2) they served a ritual purpose in that anyone "unclean" could not participate in the sacrificial service. Ritual purity was a major emphasis in conducting any of the temple activities. Included in this regulation was the prohibition against eating all but certain types of animals (Lev. 11; Deut. 14) and such things as the blood and body fat of these animals.

Nowhere in all these regulations is anything stated specifically about physical health. Yet physical health seems clearly to be one aspect of these regulations. The continual requirement of washing after touching dead bodies or engaging in certain activities has the concept of hygiene behind it. Modern science also discovered the dangers of consuming animal fats (they are high in cholesterol among other things). Public health doctors are also acutely aware of the importance of quarantine in avoiding the spread of disease, another requirement for various types of disease in ancient Israel (e.g. Lev. 13).

Modem science has also found that certain of the biblically proscribed animals present potential health hazards. For example, the danger of contracting trichinosis from pork is one known by almost every housewife. Such scavengers as crabs are also among the most affected by conditions of pollution since they tend to feed in contaminated areas and thus concentrate the dangerous substances in their bodies. Granted, these are only potential hazards. However, there is always the question of whether there may be other, as yet unknown, dangers to be discovered by science in the future—dangers known and forestalled by the Creator of all.

True Christians, however, obey these Old Testament directions because God *says* to do so. God stated that man should avoid using certain animals as food, and He, as Creator of both man and animals, knows best. The laws of clean and unclean meats clearly transcend any ritualistic system given to Moses and Israel, since Noah obviously knew about clean and unclean animals generations before (Gen. 7:2; 9:4). It is recognized that total avoidance of these and other potential hazards in our environment is nearly impossible. They are physical matters to be kept in balance and perspective. The Church does not have a rigid, ultraorthodox-type ruling that forbids eating out in restaurants or buying packaged foods. One simply exercises a reasonable amount of care, yet does not make a fetish of the regulations. The Church continues to abide by the prohibitions against blood, animal fat, and certain kinds of animal flesh (Lev. 11; Duet. 14). (The Church does not see any direct biblical support for the orthodox Jewish practice of not eating meat and milk together and thus does not have any such regulations, even though some of its food practices may otherwise resemble those of orthodox Jews.)

The Year of Release and the Jubilee: According to Leviticus 25, every seventh year was set aside to allow the land to rest (no crops were to be planted, and the permanent orchards and vineyards were to be left unattended) and for releasing all debts and fellow countrymen kept as slaves. Every fiftieth year was also a year of release (thus making two in a row) but additionally a time when land reverted to its original owner. The seventh year and jubilee were major events in the society of ancient Israel and required the cooperation of the entire community to be effectual.

Today's society is not designed for this institution. (Even the jubilee was evidently never observed after the return of the Jews from Babylon.) Farmers may not always own their own land. Those who do are often not in a financial position to allow their entire land to rest for a full year; their creditors would not allow them to do that. Debts are considered owed until paid, regardless of the year. (In fact, as discussed in the next section under "Monetary Interest," to release debts incurred voluntarily rather than from necessity were not part of the original intent of the law.) Fortunately, slavery is no longer practiced either, in most areas of the

world, rendering this law inapplicable.

It is recognized that allowing one's land to lie fallow every so many years is a good agricultural procedure. Thus, the seventh year land rest teaches a principle from which farmers can indeed learn. Yet the same result can be accomplished by letting a portion of the land lie fallow each year rather than the whole land every seventh year. The Church recognizes the agricultural and other principles in the laws about the year of release and the jubilee. But, because our society is constituted differently, the Church teaches that each person should observe them as best he or she can, according to their circumstances and according to the spirit of the law. Farmers are not required to let all their land lie fallow each seventh year, nor should they feel a moral obligation to do so. The important thing is that they respect their heritage—the land, its environment—and do their best to protect it according to the ability and means God gave them. In this way, the intent of the Old Testament laws (Lev. 25; Deut 15:1–8) is achieved even though the exact means of application may not be the same as in ancient Israel.

Monetary Interest: A number of passages forbade charging interest on loans to the poor (Ex. 22:25–27; Lev. 25:35–36). Deuteronomy 23:19–20 forbids charging interest on money, food, or other items leant out to one's fellow Israelite, but the text does not mention the fellow Israelite's economic status. This could mean that charging interest on any loan made to any fellow Israelite, regardless of economic status, is forbidden; but then, the fact that the brother needs a loan might imply that he is poor. In either case, the Church considers that this principle still applies today: one should not lend money at interest to anyone in genuine need. Yet most contractual loans today are not for the purpose of assistance to those in absolute need but instead are a means of obtaining capital over a period of time. In other words, a person has an amount sufficient to maintain his life and well-being but wants an additional investment or luxury. He could save his money over a long period of time to obtain the particular item. Or he could enjoy it now while turning the savings payment into a repayment for loan. It is perfectly legitimate to consider interest in such a case as simply payment for services rendered. Likewise, for corporations and institutions to be able to borrow money from banks it is essential for economic growth.

Our modern society runs on credit. To require members of the Church to avoid all borrowing or lending at interest would be asking them to live outside society. The original intent of the law was simply to avoid adding an additional burden on the poor who had to borrow because of financial difficulties. Only in such cases of dire emergency does the Church consider it wrong to charge interest.

Summary: Many other examples could be given, but the major ones listed above should be sufficient to illustrate how the Church applies the Old Testament laws. It considers the Hebrew Bible very much a part of God's Word. It is not considered secondary to the New Testament nor in any way inferior to it. Yet it is superseded in the sense that the New Testament has made some specific changes to deal with spiritual Israel, which has replaced the physical theocracy of ancient Israel.

In a number of cases on which the New Testament throws little direct light, the Church has had to make decisions based on the Old Testament. Time may yet show the need for modification or change of some of these decisions. Nevertheless, the Church of God exercises the power and authority given to it by God. If such decisions could not be made, each person would drift into doing what seems right in his or her own eyes and confusion would quickly result. Therefore, the Church assumes its God-ordained prerogatives to step in and make decisions where it deems necessary and helpful, always remaining aware that each individual has to serve God according to the best of his own knowledge and conscience. The purpose of giving regulations is to achieve unity of thought and practice in major areas without trying to take away from the direct, personal relationship each person should have with God.

By making decisions, the Church is attempting to stay true to, and consistent with, the Bible. In some cases, attempting to apply the exact Old Testament practice today would actually violate the intent of the law rather than observe it. Changes have to be made as society and culture both change. Sometimes the Bible is not perfectly understood and mistakes are made. But this is inevitable as long as the Church is made up of human beings and as long as God continues to work through human instruments. The important thing is that there always be the proper respect for the Bible, and desire to understand God's mind and to fulfil His

wishes. This requires a continual searching for the mind of God and making of decisions to keep the Church in line with that mind. Since the Old Testament also represents the mind of God, it cannot be neglected in this process. Progressive revelation of the will of God cannot be logically inconsistent with previous revelation.

Conclusion: Law in the Life of a Christian

The law is very important in the life of a Christian. Of course, he knows that he cannot earn salvation by it. He knows it is not an end in itself but only the road by which he draws closer to the mind of God and hence to God Himself. The law leads him to godly love. No written law can fully or completely express the depths of love. The "letter of the law" is always an inadequate means of expressing what love is. This is why Christians must keep the law in the spirit. Keeping the letter of the law alone may not be a complete expression of love; it is only when one looks behind the letter to the spirit, that the true understanding can be seen to correctly apply the letter to show godly love.

For example, a Christian recognizes killing another individual is hardly showing love for him. But just keeping the literal letter of the law, which says, "Thou shalt not kill," is still not sufficient. One must also not hate the other individual, and go yet further and demonstrate a positive outgoing concern for that individual. Yet true concern for another person's welfare does not usually come naturally (cf. Rom. 8:7), it has to be learned. It is a concept, which must be captured and internalized. No amount of explanation can force a person to capture the true spirit of love; no amount of legal wording in a decree can bypass human nature. One can only grasp the concept when guided by the Holy Spirit.

The law of God, properly understood in its spiritual intent, enables one to express both love toward God and love toward one's fellow human beings. It defines the relationship with God, which shall encourage and stimulate spiritual growth. Furthermore, the law of God defines relationships between human beings that foster the development of genuine concern for one's neighbour. In so doing, the law of God also defines the spiritual parameters, which, if observed, would maximize the genuine welfare of both individuals within a society and of society as a whole.

The law of God, properly conceived in its spiritual intent, in no way restricts the flow of godly love. On the contrary, the law instructs man how to love. The law is inherently a law of love.

On the other hand, it is the love of God that enables a Christian to fulfil the law (Rom. 13:10). It is through godly love that the full meaning and intent of the law is expressed. Hence, God's love and God's law mutually envelop one another in a symbiotic relationship, with the one supporting the other.

The eternal and holy law of God kept in its spiritual intent provides the essential instructional framework a Christian needs for his godly life. As one grows in understanding and in personal application of God's law, he nurtures within himself the qualities of holiness, justice, and goodness (Rom. 7:12).

A Christian will make mistakes. If he is wholehearted and desirous of doing all he can to serve God, he may end up making more mistakes—sinning more—than the one who concentrates on his inward state and holds back from positive action for fear of error. God is concerned about the mind and attitude. He does not need us, and in that sense, our service to God is really no service, since He could do it all much better without us. But our service is a means of building character and proving our devotion to God. It is that devotion and love towards Him that He most wants for *our* ultimate good. Mistakes can be corrected and sins can be forgiven, but character is either present or lacking. Therefore, the Christian learns to put his life in perspective. There are sins that weigh one down and continually dog one's steps so that little can be accomplished. These sins must be overcome. But there are also inevitable sins that occur as a consequence of the frailties of our human nature. These are also important, but one should not allow them to dominate his thoughts so that he turns away from life. There is more to a Christian life than just avoiding trouble.

The one who has been forgiven much is also the one who is grateful for much. He may not be as likely to take God's mercy for granted as the one who thinks he has never really sinned all that much. The one who has been close to death appreciates life more than the one who has always had health and safety. Self-righteousness is perhaps the worst spiritual malady, and tends to be bred in an environment of constant attention to outward forms of

righteousness.

The true Christian knows that the law is good, not solely because biblical writers say it is, but because he has experienced its blessings in his own life. This does not mean conforming to this spiritual guide is necessarily easy. On the contrary, it can be very difficult, even with the help of the Holy Spirit. Yet the end result is worth the toil, because God's law produces spiritual character and the natural blessings, which result from expressing godly love.

Neither is it always easy to know what to do in any given situation. Comprehension of God's law is something that requires effort, study, time, and practice. However, when the law is understood, the reasons for it become obvious and beneficial results that accrue from following it stand out. Ultimately, the law can be understood, as well as followed, but only by the aid of the Holy Spirit. Those who have made the effort to understand and obey can testify that it makes perfect sense. The Christian grows, develops, and builds character as he contemplates the law, meditates on it, and sees its purpose and judgment.

A Christian realizes his need to live by faith. Faith is directed toward the future. It aims at a promise that has only been fulfilled in part by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Yet faith is not just a passive state or a vague form of wishful thinking. Faith implies action; faith requires works (Jas. 2:14–26). Works can never earn salvation but works are necessary for the Christian life. A person who is following God will produce good works—fulfilment of the law—as a natural consequence of his conversion and possession of the Holy Spirit. These works are not an end in themselves. The ultimate goal is the Kingdom and family of God. But even though good works do not produce the Kingdom, one shall never reach God's Kingdom without them. For one who does not have good works also does not have the Holy Spirit. Love—fulfilling the law—is the natural product of the Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, the goal of the Christian is to attain the mind of God. At the resurrection, there shall be no further need for guidelines. Perfect love shall become internalized, fully expressible without external law, with results that have no need for law codes. But love cannot be comprehended without the law. It requires an understanding of love to truly appreciate the law. But one cannot come to that understanding unless they first start to obey the law. That is the beginning, and love is its end.

To the Christian, God's law is the way to happiness, peace of mind, and, ultimately, salvation. To follow God's law is the way one becomes more like God; indeed, he can practice being like God, so that God can give him eternal spiritual life in His family.

True freedom is an outgrowth of perfect law. Human government recognizes that freedom requires regulations so that one individual's freedom does not encroach upon the freedom of his fellow citizens. There are limits to freedom in order for freedom to exist; the greatest enslaver is anarchy. Perfect freedom comes from the perfect law of God, which is the law of love. When perfect love is expressed, perfect freedom exists. The law, therefore, is a summary of what constitutes love and how it is best expressed.

James was inspired to call God's law "the perfect law of liberty" and the "royal law" (Jas. 1:25; 2:8). It is indeed a perfect and royal law, because a perfect and royal King—our Savior, Jesus Christ—gave it to us.

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BIBLICAL COVENANTS

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Both testaments record that God made certain promises to man in the form of specific contracts or agreements with him. These are called "covenants" and define the terms of God's relationship with individuals or groups in various circumstances and eras. Of these covenants the best known are the covenants made with the nation Israel and the New Covenant established on "better promises," which will be fully confirmed with spiritual Israel (the Church of God) after the return of Jesus Christ. The

New Covenant, which also applies to the New Testament Church from the time of the original apostles, makes God's law even more relevant by magnifying it to include one's mental attitude and spiritual intent.

Matthew 5:21–22; 2 Timothy 3:15–16; Hebrews 8:6–13, Jeremiah 31:31-34

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

In recording the history of God's relationship to mankind, the Bible reveals various examples of covenants made between God and certain individuals or nations. A covenant may be defined as an agreement, written or verbal, whereby two or more parties agree to a certain relationship governed by specific rules and yielding commensurate results. This usually involves certain conditions to be fulfilled by one or all parties. Therefore, a covenant is most closely analogous to our present day "contract," though any such analogy must be an oversimplification.

A contract implies a clear bilateral agreement with both (or all) sides fully agreeing to the terms. But God's covenants are not always so bilaterally equal. In almost every situation it is God who sets all the ground rules, God who formulates all the conditions, and God who stipulates all the results. Man is simply given the choice of agreeing to comply and receive the tremendous benefits, or not agree to comply, in which case he does not receive the benefits, but instead, suffers the terrible consequences. As such, God's covenants could perhaps be better characterized as "promises" since they are most often unilateral. As God has defined His covenantal relationship with man, He promises to do something if man does something, and He promises to do something else if man does something else. So keep in mind, if we enter into the covenant agreement (baptism), God will hold us accountable—for judgment begins at the House of God (1 Pet. 4:19).

God's purpose in making covenants has always been, and still is, to officially and clearly delineate what He expects from man and what man can expect from Him. By understanding these covenants an individual may come to a better knowledge of God's will and desire for mankind and also realize the conditions that will lead to prosperity and abundance.

In the Old Testament a number of important covenants are discussed. In Genesis 9:8–17, for example, God promises Noah He will never again destroy life with a world-wide flood. Later on in Genesis we read how God made a covenant with Abraham—which He later reiterated and expanded—which provided physical blessings of wealth and affluence to him and eventually to all of humanity through Abraham's descendants (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:18–21; 17:1–27; 22:15–18; 26:4–5; 28:12–15). Another covenant example was the agreement God made with King David (2 Sam. 7:12–16; 1 Chron. 17:11–14). To one degree or another most major biblical covenants interrelate and intertwine. To understand any one covenant completely, we must usually have a working knowledge of the others. For example, the covenant God made with Abraham has as its promises certain blessings that are reiterated in whole or in part in later covenants.

The best known of the Old Testament covenants is that between God and the Israelites made at Mount Sinai. After bringing the Israelite slaves out of bondage from Egypt, God made an agreement or covenant with them (Ex. 19–24). In return for obedience to the Ten Commandments and other laws enumerated in Exodus 20–23, God promised certain physical blessings. Included among these were protection from enemies, removal of sickness, and abundance of food and water. Noticeably absent from among these promises was any mention of spiritual benefits, such as forgiveness of sin and eternal life. The promises of the covenant given were strictly temporal and physical, as Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 bring out in clear detail. Conversely, disobedience to these laws would be followed by curses affecting the same areas of the Israelites' physical lives as did the promises. Moses served as the mediator of this covenant, which was then ratified with the blood of animals. Despite temporary periods of relative obedience, the later history recorded in the biblical account shows the unfaithfulness of the Israelites who repeatedly broke their part of the covenant.

In the New Testament, another covenant is proposed by God to replace this old covenant that had been made with the nation of Israel. This New Covenant had already been prophesied in Jeremiah

31:31–34 and is discussed in detail in Hebrews 8:6–13. This New Covenant is to be a "better covenant" than the Old Covenant since it will be established upon "better promises" (Heb. 8:6). These "better promises" are spiritual in nature and far transcend the physical promises given to ancient Israel. These promises include: grace (unmerited favor in God's sight demonstrated in numerous ways), forgiveness of sins, eternal life as sons in God's family, God's putting His laws into our minds and writing them in our hearts, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, and other spiritual blessings of various kinds which are of enormous value.

Through these better promises God immeasurably extends the benefits of His relationship with man. For example, by means of the Holy Spirit, it is now more possible to keep the spiritual intent of the law, whereas those under the Old Covenant did not keep even the physical letter of the law. The New Covenant is also nonethnic, being offered to all who repent and through baptism become Abraham's spiritual descendants and heirs (Gal. 4:28; Is. 55:1–3; 59:20–21).

The New Covenant will not be applicable in its full force and widest sense until Jesus Christ returns and establishes it with the nation Israel, after their recovery from captivity at the beginning of the Millennium—this is the clear message of the prophets (Is. 11:10–16; 27:13; Jer. 16:13–15; 23:6–8; Ezek. 37:16–22; Zech. 14:9–21; Heb. 8:10–13). All peoples and nations of the world shall then have an opportunity to enter into this same New Covenant relationship with God, though the nation Israel will be the international example as God's law will go forth from Zion (Is. 2:1–5; Mic. 4:1–5). However, since Jesus Christ is presently called "the mediator of the New Covenant" (Heb. 12:24), the New Covenant is currently in force for all true Christians today that have accepted Him as their Savior.

The differences between the promises of the Old and New Covenants extend beyond their content—there is also a difference in the timing of their ultimate fulfilment, and this difference is instructive in further understanding the application of the New Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, the physical promises of blessings or cursings that were fulfilled (within whatever time period) according to whether Israel obeyed or disobeyed God's law. Under the New Covenant, God's promises are assuredly given to His begotten children, but God's begotten children (converted Christians) will not *receive* the promises in their maximum fulfillment until Christ's return. This event is described in 1 Corinthians 15:51–53, when "we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality."

Indeed all the patriarchs and prophets of the Bible have not yet received God's promises: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises" (Heb. 11:13). "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promises: God having provided something better for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:39–40).

God has determined that He will fulfill His greater promises of the New Covenant to all His people, from all the ages and eras of man, at the same time; this will be at the momentous turning point of history—the return of Jesus Christ.

It is critical to understand that the agreement and acceptance of the New Covenant commits both God and men to stricter—not lighter—terms. God is now bound to the spiritual promises mentioned above. Likewise man is more tightly bound to God's law, the Ten Commandments and Jesus' expansions of it. Far from being free from obedience to God's law, the true Christian is now more fully responsible to keep the law in its complete spirit and intent (Mt. 5:17). As Jeremiah 31:33 states, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." Thus God says His law shall not be done away but rather become more deeply ingrained in His people (see also Heb. 8:8ff; 10:16ff).

Clearly, God's writing His law "within" His people and "upon their hearts" is not some magical transformation or mystical experience by which God will suddenly and automatically rewire our brains and reprogram our minds. God, in His wisdom, has determined that true character cannot be built instantly by fiat, not even by divine fiat. While it is possible for God to command and enforce instant obedience, that is not at all the same thing as developing true godly *character*. Character can be defined as the internalized desire and determination

to obey God, backed by the mental fortitude and resolve to obey through all circumstances, however difficult. Character is generated by a process of conscious experience, through tests and trials, which results in growth and development. God designed human beings to become His sons; and sons must do more than just obey, they must radiate God's character from within. Consequently, under the New Covenant, God shall make His laws known and His Spirit available, enabling people to understand and keep those laws. Thus, the opportunity to enter into the *process* of conversion—of living God's way throughout a long, rich physical life—will be available to all who accept the invitation to be included in the New Covenant. Today it is only available to the relative few, those who have responded to the call out of the world by God into His Church. After the return of Christ it will be available to the vast multitudes—those comprising the physical nation of Israel, as the example—and then every other nation on earth, all people who will gladly submit themselves to God will be afforded to gain access to this covenant.

The fundamental unity between Old and New Covenants is an essential element in biblical understanding. The law is principally the same, created by the same God, but our relationship to it differs. The law of the Old Covenant required physical obedience and offered physical promises; the law of the New Covenant requires spiritual obedience, which is far tougher, and offers spiritual promises, which are enormously greater.

The greatest illustration showing that God's law is expanded and made more binding (rather than abrogated) by the New Testament is the "Sermon on the Mount" (Mt. 5ff). Here Christ, speaking to His disciples (who would receive God's Spirit and hence enter into a new covenantal relationship with Him), clearly told them that not one "jot or tittle" would pass from the law. (This is indeed logical since the Jesus Christ of the New Covenant is the same being who was the God of Israel in the Old Covenant. Ref: Jesus Christ.) Jesus further spoke against the concept that obedience was not necessary by saying whosoever taught this error would not be in His kingdom (Mt. 5:19). He goes even further and gives definite examples that conclusively show we must *keep* the Ten Commandments more strictly in their spiritual intent than under the Old Covenant. For example, the commandment against the physical act of murder is expanded to include the spiritual attitude of anger, etc. Clearly the concept that the law need not be kept under the New Covenant is an error. Indeed what God is developing is an "internalization" of obedience to Him, flowing out of our own intrinsic mental character rather than through the external coercion of physical punishment. What Jesus was restoring was the internalization of the law that God intended—even for the Old Covenant—as shown when Jeremiah pleaded for Judah to circumcise their "hearts" (Jer. 4:4), and when Moses prophesied that Israel would provoke God with disobedience, yet God would be found if they seek Him with all their hearts and with all their souls (Deut. 4:29).

The offer of the New Covenant to the world as a whole is a future event. Thus, its full effect will not occur until the return of Christ and His thousand-year reign. But God today is calling people to His Church and the accompanying New Covenant relationship, and a few elect individuals are responding. Upon repentance and baptism these individuals can receive God's Holy Spirit and enter into this New Covenant (Mt. 26:26–27; Heb. 10:9–10); and those who indeed will abide by its terms (acceptance of Christ's sacrifice and God's grace, obedience, faith, etc.) shall receive its incredible promises of eternal inheritance and immortality within the Family of God.

God is not a God who leaves our relationship with Him to chance or doubt. He has rather formulated covenants through which He makes plain our responsibilities as Christians toward Him and His responsibility toward us. If we fulfill our responsibilities toward God, we will be blest.

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TEN COMMANDMENTS

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The Ten Commandments, as revealed by God, codified by Moses, and ratified and magnified by Christ, represent the most fundamental categories of moral law. They are the foundation of all biblical teaching, showing man how to express love toward God and fellowman, and are consequently the focal point of Christian life.

Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5; Matthew 5:17–19; Romans 13:10; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Revelation 12:17; 22:14

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

When God initially spoke to the Israelites from Sinai, He gave them the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1–17). It is true that the full covenant made with Israel at Sinai also contained other rules, regulations, and commands (Ex. 20–24). Yet the only code spoken directly to the people, rather than through Moses, and written on the tables of stone placed in the Ark of the Covenant was the code of the Ten Commandments. Even historians who see no uniqueness in the Old Testament as a religious document have recognized the vital importance of these ten major precepts.

Jesus Christ specifically listed *five of the Ten Commandments* (fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth commandments) when He told the young rich man, "*If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments*" (Mt. 19:17). He also pointed out that the Ten Commandments have two basic objectives (Mt. 19:16–22; Mk. 10:17–22; Lk. 18:18–23): (1) the first four show how one is to love, worship, and honor God, and (2) the final six give the basis for how to love other human beings. Indeed, Jesus summarized the two basic objectives of the Ten Commandments when He answered the Pharisee's question:

> "Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Mt. 22:36–40).

James wrote that "whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it" (Jas. 2:10). What "law" was James so strongly upholding in this context? He makes this plain in the next verse by discussing two of the *Ten Commandments* (the sixth and seventh commandments).

John wrote profoundly about God's commandments in his first epistle: "And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 Jn. 2:3), for anyone "that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in Him" (v. 4). Moreover, "whatever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments" (1 Jn. 3:22).

Ultimately, the whole object is the love of God, which is the essence of God's being: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 Jn. 5:3). The entirety of the law—in both its major and minor points—has the object of teaching us what godly love is. Yet even though each part is a section of the whole, unique stress has always been placed on the specific ten points first enumerated as such at Mount Sinai. One can see an obvious reason for this.

The problems of our modern legal system are well known. Some laws are so badly worded that the individual citizen is hard put to know exactly what the legislators had in mind and how he is to obey the laws. On the other hand, each individual is continually beset on all sides by a jumble of petty regulations that seem to irritate more than help. How is one to come to grips with the situation without having to become a professional lawyer, as it were? The Ten Commandments, by contrast, are a paradigm for the modem legislator. The Ten Commandments provide a few convenient cate-

gories by which all laws can be organized.

To illustrate the importance of the Ten Commandments as the basic summarizing principles of God's mind, the following section gives a synopsis of each and shows how it serves as a major category of heading under which many important but more detailed commands can be organized.

First Commandment: Worshipping No Gods But the True God. Many regulations of the Old and New Testaments relate to worshipping and honoring only the one God. In today's society there are few who follow blatant polytheism. And though historians acknowledge Israel as the cradle of monotheism, most educated Romans and Greeks also thought in terms of a basic monotheism by the time of Jesus. Yet polytheism easily exists in a more subtle form in every age and society. Human nature naturally places the self rather than God at the center of the personal universe. Man by nature first worships himself. Even the initial impulse to worship a superior being—a god, or even the true God—is often a selfish one, since such worship is undertaken in order to stave off disaster (by sacrifice or other propitiatory means), or to ask a favor, or to obtain salvation. Worship of God for its own sake is completely possible only by means of the Holy Spirit.

Second Commandment: No Manufactured Images of God. Human beings naturally like to deal with physical objects. Worshipping an invisible God and recognizing He is more real than even the physical world does not come easily. Therefore, man seeks physical "aids" in worshipping God rather than coming to grips with the true reality of the transcendent, invisible God inaccessible to the five senses. Pagan worshippers seldom regarded their idol as the actual deity itself. On the contrary, the idol was merely a representative of the invisible god in heaven. The idol served as an aid to worship, as icons and statutes in various religions do today. Since the use of images in reality only serves to impede true understanding of the spiritual and invisible Creator God, it was—and is—forbidden.

Third Commandment: **Not Taking God's Name in Vain.** Respect the world over is to a considerable extent demonstrated by the manner in which one refers to the object of respect. One does not address the chairman of the board frivolously or familiarly. To make use of God's name lightly—whether as an interjection in day-to-day conversation, or as a witness to an event that really doesn't concern Him (swearing and taking oaths), or in a context that does not show respect or honor—shows an unacceptable attitude toward God Himself. All of us eventually have to come to see God as the center of the universe and of all reality. That required insight is impossible without the utmost respect and honor toward God. How one uses His name is an outward indicator of how one really feels towards Him.

The third commandment has a deeper meaning as well—we are not to do anything that could hold God's name up to scorn. As Christians—and as God's Church—what we do, what we teach and how we teach it directly reflects upon God. We should take this responsibility seriously. It is true that YHWH (pronounced variously: Yahweh, Yahoweh, Jehovah, etc.) is the name (and title) most often used of God in the Hebrew Scriptures, and that most other terms used in reference to the Deity are titles describing one or more of His divine attributes (such as YHWH *Rapha*: "The LORD who Heals," or *Elohim*: "the All-Powerful One"). We know that the Messiah's name is Jesus (Yeshua, or Yahshua). But we're told in Isaiah 9:6 that "his name is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." The Hebrew word *sem* (rendered "name") can be used of any term that describes the character, fame, and attributes of the person to whom that particular term pertains. This commandment ensures we treat all references to God—names or titles—with the respect God deserves.

Fourth Commandment: Sabbath for Rest and Worship. The Sabbath command is very much a pivotal one, serving both as a means of honoring and worshipping God and of aiding man. First of all, the Sabbath is a memorial of Creation pointing to God as the Creator. Secondly, the human body requires rest for efficient bodily function and a proper mental outlook. Therefore, God commanded man to rest a full day once a week plus setting aside certain other days for annual times of rest and rejoicing. Man by nature needs periodic holidays. Had God not given some to Israel, they would have invented their own. Moreover, God not only gave weekly and annual days of rest, but He required that slaves—and even beasts of burden—be allowed to enjoy rest on these days. This was a demonstration of love for one's fellow man as well as kindness to

animals.

Thirdly, while periodical physical rest is sufficient to meet physical needs, the Sabbath and annual holy days serve a spiritual function also. Indeed, this is their primary purpose. They provide the opportunity for study and for meeting to receive instruction in the ways of God. They provided the opportunity for worship and intellectual and spiritual pursuits that may not be possible during the day-to-day task of making a living. Again, any day of the week would suffice for this as well as for physical rest. The spiritual aspect lies in the fact that (1) it is a time God has chosen, a fact significant in itself since one shows respect to God by worshipping when and as He says rather than as the individual chooses; and that (2) the choice of the seventh day also points back to Creation and, as a consequence, to the Creator. Further, both the weekly and annual Sabbaths serve to point out God's overall plan to man. This is all part of the process of acquiring God's mind, which is perfect love. (An expression of the fourth commandment to include the annual festivals is indicated by some of the scriptures which utilize the plural form of the Hebrew word *shabbat*.)

Fifth Commandment: Honor of Parents. The parents are the first authority in a child's life. They are also the first source and the first object of his love. By respecting and honoring his parents the child learns respect for constituted authority in general, and eventually learns respect for the ultimate authority, God. In the same way, he learns love from the love of his parents. As he returns that love, he begins to see how love must also be directed toward a broader circle, and eventually toward the Source of all things. Familial love is the basis of a stable family unit, which in turn is the basis of a stable society. Loving one's parents is thus crucial in a positive environment in which love is learned and expressed, and God thereby worshipped. It is also a necessary step in learning to love God.

Sixth Commandment: Respect for Another's Life. Any orderly society has certain restrictions on the taking of human life. Absolute prohibition against taking human life does not exist in human society, but the basic principle is, at least, recognized. A number of Old Testament laws governing warfare and the execution of criminals relate to a physical nation rather than to a spiritual church. Life could be taken under certain circumstances. However, Jesus showed that even hating was wrong, since hating preceded murder and murder never embodied love. Even Old Testament laws clearly taught the lack of care for the safety of another was only one step removed from deliberate murder. A number of laws regulated potential or actual cases of manslaughter. If a man accidentally killed another, the law protected him by allowing him a place of refuge. This prevented another life from being taken in revenge for the accident. On the other hand, the one guilty of manslaughter had to suffer a temporary exile, which demonstrated the seriousness of the incident, showing that he might perhaps have prevented a death had he been more careful. In other cases, the guilt of the careless individual was more clearly defined, as for example, in not building a guard rail on his roof or not keeping a belligerent farm animal safely locked up. Clearly, more than just premeditated murder is being regulated and punished.

Seventh Commandment: The Marriage Institution. Adultery is probably the most blatant offense against another person's marital partner. Forcible adultery (rape) or consenting adultery both violate an intimate bond between husband and wife, even if the wronged partner is not aware of it. Consenting adultery strikes at the very bedrock of society, the marriage and family unit, shattering the most intimate human bond. Rape constitutes a violation of another person's body, mental and physical health, and right to make personal decisions. Rape could never be considered an act of love.

Scripture forbids other sexual practices (e.g. homosexuality, bestiality) because they degrade the human mind and body, and because they are substituted perversions of the God-ordained marital bond. Sexual relations with near of kin are potentially hazardous to unborn offspring. Premarital sexual relations are potentially adulterous since the partners in such relations may eventually marry someone else. Similarly, to live together sexually before marriage is to give a distorted view of the purpose of marriage and take away an important physical incentive for marriage in the first place. All of these have consequences for one's ability to love others.

Finally, since marriage is also a picture—in miniature—of God's plan and nature, a wrong approach towards marriage can cause one to overlook the important spiritual truths about the ultimate destiny of man and the eternal Family of God

that can be understood from a proper marriage.

Eighth Commandment: Respect for the Property of Others. Love for another requires respect for his empirical self, which includes his family and physical possessions. While the greatest possession one has is life, and the next greatest is one's marital partner and family, personal property may be an important necessity for continued existence. To take another's property, in a poor society, may sentence him to malnutrition and a slow death. In a more affluent society, it may produce mental and emotional consequences. Therefore, we must learn to respect the rights and needs of others.

Ninth Commandment: Honesty in Dealing with Others. This commandment is phrased in a legal manner because one of the most obvious ways to defraud another is to testify falsely against him in court. This could cause loss of property, freedom, or even life. Yet, complete honesty and aboveboard dealing is also envisioned. One has, in a sense, witnessed falsely when he uses a scale that has been tampered with. Misrepresentation to get ahead means that a more deserving person is passed over. Lying to boost one's ego, thereby deflating someone else's, is also blatant disregard for another. Such self-centered dealings to the exclusion of others are unconscionable and the antithesis of love—a violation of the ninth commandment.

Tenth Commandment: The Beginning of True Love is in the Mind. The specific phrasing of this command proscribes desiring what is not lawful for an individual to have: another person's property, mate, position, or whatever. In a sense, this gets at the heart of the four previous commands. One does not kill unless he desires something another person has or can give him (such as property, a better position, an improved reputation, the elimination of a threat or problem, money, power, etc.). Even revenge can usually be traced back to envy, a form of covetousness. One does not commit adultery or other sexual sins unless he has first desired what he was not entitled to, or what he was not allowed to have. One does not steal or gain through dishonesty without first taking possession of the forbidden object in one's mind. If a person can control his nature at this point, many of the other temptations shall take care of themselves. Indeed, the tenth commandment is spiritual in form and content—it is concerned with the unlawful desire in the mind as well as the specific act. In this sense, it points to and foreshadows the future teachings of Jesus Christ. As Paul wrote in Philippians 2:3, 5: "Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.… Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

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SABBATH

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The seventh-day Sabbath is taught and kept holy in accordance with biblical instruction. Instituted at Creation, reaffirmed to Israel as a part of the covenant at Sinai, and taught by Jesus Christ, who is the Messenger of the New Covenant, the observance of the Sabbath is considered basic to a Christian's relationship with God.

Genesis 2:2–3; Exodus 16; 20:8–11; 31:12–17; Mark 2:27–28; Luke 4:16; Hebrews 4:9

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Church of God continues to observe the seventh-day as did Jesus and the New Testament Church. God established the Sabbath at Creation week; it was made for man, reaffirmed by Jesus, taught by the apostles, and kept down through the centuries by faithful Christians. The importance of the Sabbath in the Old Testament cannot be disputed. Its continued observance is exemplified in the New Testament, which confirms Sabbath-keeping as a fundamental practice of Jesus and the apostolic Church.

The original twofold functions of the Sabbath in the Old Testament were not ceremonial. The

Sabbath (1) provided needed rest for the body and the psyche; and (2) gave opportunity for closer contact with God through study and prayer. When God established Israel as His people, the Sabbath was utilized as the time for congregational services, a commanded assembly of all the people. These needs are still very much extant in the 21st century.

The weekly Sabbath celebration serves as a reminder that God is Creator by its regular memorial of the Sabbath of Creation. It also affords a view toward a future new creation resulting from God's Kingdom on earth.

While a simple, straightforward command from God to keep the Sabbath would be sufficient for us to keep it, an understanding of the Sabbath's purpose and intent is helpful and enlightening. The purpose behind most laws is clear, and that which lies behind the Old Testament commands about the Sabbath is evident. Once this purpose is understood, it becomes obvious why no New Testament restatement of the basic command was necessary or even likely. The New Testament discussions and examples concern *how* to keep the Sabbath (in spirit rather than in a rigid, legalistic manner), *not whether* to keep it.

The most important New Testament statement on the Sabbath was spoken by Jesus Christ as quoted in Mark 2:27–28. Jesus not only affirms the Sabbath command, He also instructs us about its purpose. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath." Thus, it is apparent the Sabbath was made for men, for his spiritual and physical benefit. It provides the means for loving God to a greater degree by direct worship and, indirectly, by the spiritual renewal, which enables one to keep up a constant direction of mind toward godly matters throughout the week. It is in our earnest attempt to express loyalty and love toward our Creator and to worship Him in spirit and in truth that we, as Christians, continue to keep the seventh-day Sabbath.

DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

The English word "Sabbath" is basically an anglicized pronunciation of a Hebrew word meaning "rest" or "repose." This Hebrew noun is itself evidently related to the verb "to stop, rest, or *cease*." This same verb is found in ordinary usage (e.g. Lam. 5:14, "The elders have ceased from the gate"). "Ceasing" is exactly what God did on the seventh day of Creation week. In the Hebrew, Genesis 2:2 literally says that God "*sabbathed*"—"*ceased*" or "rested"—on the seventh day from all His work.

By definition, the Sabbath is a weekly holy day, a solemn rest, an appointed feast, a holy convocation (Lev. 23:3). As such it is a period of approximately 24 hours reckoned from sundown Friday evening until sundown Saturday evening. The period of observation is borne out both by the repeated phrase, "And the evening and the morning were the . . . day," in Genesis 1 and by direct statements in such passages as Leviticus 23:32 on observing an annual Sabbath "from evening to evening."

Old Testament Period

The initial and cardinal passage about the Sabbath is contained in the Creation account, which reads: "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it" (Gen. 2:1–3).

Since from the beginning the Sabbath is associated with Creation week and specifically the creation of man, the Sabbath's universal or cosmopolitan perspective sets it above any unique Israelite law and practice. The Creation Sabbath is presented in much the same way the later prophets envisioned it—namely as an observance for all mankind, for the Gentile as well as for the Israelite. Therefore, while the Sabbath was later a functional part of the covenant at Sinai (Ex. 20–24), its purpose and place are clearly much broader than that. (For example, Isaiah 66:23 shows all nations will be observing the Sabbath during the millennial reign of Christ.)

In Exodus 16 the Sabbath is once again explicitly mentioned. This chapter records God's revealing of which day was indeed the seventh of the week—the Sabbath—to the nation of Israel. God's great efforts to show Israel His true Sabbath would, of course, be natural in light of the importance given the Sabbath in the Creation account. He would surely want His chosen people to know which day He earmarked as "blessed and sanctified."

The account of Exodus 16 shows the great importance God places on a specific period of time for the

Sabbath. The true Sabbath could never be just one day, any day, out of seven. God caused special miracles to ratify the holiness of the Sabbath—double the normal amount of manna was found on the sixth day, and the extra manna did not spoil when left until morning as it would have on any other day. And when some Israelites went looking for manna on the Sabbath, God told Moses, "How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?" (v. 28). This statement is especially relevant since it took place *before* the covenant at Sinai, proving both the Sabbath predated that covenant and it is included as one of God's commandments and laws.

The additional significance of the account of Exodus 16 lies in the fact that it shows the *supreme importance* of the Sabbath to God. The fact that God revealed and maintained the identity of His Sabbath to Israel by the daily and the weekly miracles of the manna—along with the clear example of the types of punishment meted out upon those who broke the Sabbath as recorded in these verses—reemphasizes that God's original Sabbath command was a law of extreme importance. The fact that the events described in Exodus 16 actually occurred in Israel *before* the institution of the covenant at Sinai corroborates the truth that the Sabbath was *not*, as some contend, only part of God's specific pact with that nation and hence of significance to no other people. But even then, the inclusion of the Sabbath by God in His covenant with Israel—His clear delineation of the Sabbath as one of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20—only *adds weight* to its importance, rather than detracting from it. At the making of the Sinai covenant the Sabbath was one of the Ten Commandments recorded on the tablets of stone and kept inside the Ark of the Covenant. Other terms of the covenant were considered of less significance as was shown by their being kept outside the ark. Once again, it is only logical that God would include in His covenant those laws and principles He knew would be good for Israel, especially because Israel was a nation He hoped would be the example and showcase to the world.

Under the Sinai covenant, the Sabbath had national significance; its observance involved the entire community. God showed this by adding to the original Genesis command a communal responsibility of Sabbath-keeping which involved children, male and female servants, and even *animals* and *strangers* within Israel's boundaries (Ex. 20:10).

God's Sabbath command of Exodus 20:8, "Remember the Sabbath . . . to keep it holy" represents an example of God definitely tutoring His special people in the obedience of a universal law, rather than His singling out one nation for obedience to an exclusive law not meant for the rest of mankind. The admonition, "Remember," itself indicates this commandment is not instituting the Sabbath for the first time, but rather enjoining Israel to keep and retain what is already in existence. The Sabbath was in existence before Israel. Some quote Nehemiah 9:13–14 as disproof of this. Actually, these verses show the opposite. God gave Israel right and true and good laws, statutes, and commandments, and He *made known* to them His Sabbath. It does *not* say He originated or instituted the Sabbath with them—it says He made it *known* to them. Israel had *lost* knowledge of it at that time, as Gentiles have today. But God revealed the Sabbath to Israel, who was to become His covenant nation. God did not create the Sabbath at Sinai, but rather made it fully known at that time.

Just as the Sabbath was commanded before the covenant of Exodus 20–24, so the Sabbath was also given as a separate covenant with special significance in Exodus 31:12–17. It is referred to as a "sign" (Hebrew *'ct*) of the special relationship between God and Israel. (Signs referred to elsewhere as evidence of covenants are: the rainbow in regard to God's covenant with mankind, Genesis 9:8–17; and circumcision as a sign of the covenant with Abraham, Genesis 17:1–14.)

Why was God's Sabbath day singled out in Exodus 31 as a sign? Because of its nature. Many other nations kept some of the laws of God in one form or another. Some had fairly tight moral laws, usually criminal ones. But none kept the Sabbath day. It was the one law of God that would make Israel stand out. It would act as a sign to show Israel was the nation of God. It would also keep Israel knowledgeable of God as Creator—the one true God who made everything. When the nations of the ten tribes of Israel later gave up this Sabbath sign, they were lost to history. But the Jews continue to keep this day, and are known by it. It is even called "Jewish" by others.

This Sabbath covenant of Exodus was to be "perpetual." With reference to this, some quote passages

referring to the sacrificial system being "forever" (e.g. Ex. 29:28) and conclude that when the Bible uses the term "forever," it does not mean that at all. This is not correct. The word in Hebrew translated "forever" in most instances is *olam*. It can mean "the world" or even "the age." From this we can come to the basic meaning of *olam*, that of *continuousness*. It essentially gives the concept of a situation in which there is no end in sight; this does not have to mean that there *is* no end, just that *no* end is seen from the immediate perspective. In some scriptures (e.g. Ex. 21:6) *olam* obviously means "continuously," whereas in others (e.g. Ps. 10:16) the same word means "eternally." What about "forever" in Exodus 31? The key idea to remember is that *olam* means to do something *continually* or that some condition exists *continually*. So we must go by the context. In the case of a command of God we can say that it is in force until God says differently. In the case of Exodus 31 the Sabbath *remains* between God and His people. God never did say stop. God still only deals with Israel—Abraham's seed—but in the New Testament, "Israel" has become spiritual and all peoples can, through Christ, become "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29), which promise—salvation—"is of the Jews" (Jn. 4:22). Everyone has to become a part of Israel in order to enter into God's covenantal relationship. The Church is the Israel of God (Rom. 9:6–8). So the Sabbath remains a sign to show just who is in that covenantal relationship with God, just who the true Church is or who the people of God are. This Sabbath covenant is not the same as the Sinai covenant of Exodus 20–24. So the modification of that Sinaitic covenant to the New Covenant does not necessarily affect the Sabbath covenant.

Ezekiel 20:12 shows God gave Israel *His* Sabbath as a sign for another reason as well: so they would continually know who was the God that *sanctified* them. This means that the Sabbath is one means by which God sanctifies—a method God has chosen of consecration by setting apart for a holy purpose. Certainly sanctification is even more important in the spiritual sense of the New Covenant than it was in the physical sense of the Sinai covenant. Consequently the meaning, impact, and importance of the Sabbath in its widest spiritual intent under the New Covenant, far from being diminished, must in fact be intensified for Christians.

The Sabbath began at Creation—not with the Sinaitic covenant with Israel—and then was made a *special sign* in a covenant forever with Israel. Today "the church" is the Israel of God. As God's covenant people today, we still know the Sabbath; it is still the same sign, identifying those who worship God.

Once again, the purpose of the special Sabbath covenant of Exodus 31 was to earmark Sabbath observance as a distinguishing practice that would help identify God's people among the world's populace. Thus it served to differentiate the true believers from the nonbelievers, God's people from the heathen, and not merely the civil Israelite nation from the Egyptian or Canaanite nations. Since the Sabbath was an important *religious* command of God, its observance helped to identify God's *religious* system and not merely a civil system or ethnic group. For this reason this special Sabbath Covenant applies today, with the same spiritually binding significance for all who wish to become and remain a part of God's true Church.

Leviticus 23 enumerates the Sabbath as one of the appointed feasts of the Lord. Other passing references in the Pentateuch and historical books do not shed significant further light on what has already been mentioned. However, several important scriptures are found in the later prophets.

Clearly, one of the greatest indictments and warnings that would result in the destruction of Jerusalem was made by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 17:19–27). Jeremiah was ordered to stand in the gates of Jerusalem and warn the leaders and people: "Take heed for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day, or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers" (vv. 21–22).

Verses 24–26 promises that if the people should keep the Sabbath day holy they should be blessed, and the city of Jerusalem should remain forever. But verse 27 goes on to warn of the dire consequences of negligence in regard to the Sabbath: "then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched." This threat was made good: the city of Jerusalem was overthrown, its palaces and Temple burned and the nation of Judah taken into captivity. Disobedience toward the Sabbath command was

evidently widespread among the people in the latter years of the period of the monarchy. Jeremiah 17:23 confirms this fact: the people of Jerusalem did not heed Jeremiah's warning to keep the Sabbath ("they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction").

Ezekiel also speaks quite strongly against breaking the Sabbath and considers it one of the main reasons why Israel went into captivity. The lengthy passage in 20:10–26 is a scorching indictment of the continual disobedience of the nation. The captivity was the fulfilment of a promise in the wilderness: "Moreover I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, because they had not executed my ordinances, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my Sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their fathers' idols" (vv. 23–24). This is a very succinct summary of the cause of the Exile. Clearly, one of the major reasons was profanation of the Sabbath.

Isaiah also emphasized the importance of the Sabbath for Israel:

"If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure (pursuing your own business) on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; . . . I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth" (Is. 58:13–14).

However, more universal in nature is the promise to the Gentile ("the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD") who shall keep the Sabbath. Not only shall they be accepted, but those unfortunate enough to be eunuchs shall receive something far greater then children for their faithful Sabbath observance (Is. 56:3–7). While this promise is set in the context of national Israel, its international scope cannot be ignored.

The captives in time were freed and some returned to Palestine. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe their return and their attempts to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its Temple. Nehemiah 10 records a special covenant made by some of the people, including Nehemiah, in which they "entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord" (v. 29). Among the provisions of this covenant was that "if the peoples of the land bring in wares or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day" (v. 31). These verses make it obvious Nehemiah and the people deeply recognized the seriousness of *Sabbath-breaking* and its part in bringing about their captivity.

Nevertheless, it did not take long for the emergence of a certain laxity in this regard. Nehemiah soon found himself confronting a situation in which the Sabbath was treated as an ordinary business day. He met the problem head on and apparently solved it for the time being (Neh. 13:15–22).

During the intertestament period a great reawakening took place among the Jewish community with respect to the importance of God's laws. One catalyst was the remembrance of the exiles; another was the slaughter and persecution brought about by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C. The Jewish community "built a wall" around the law by adding oral regulations far beyond the biblical statements in an attempt to make it "impossible" for anyone to even approach breaking the law: the example of the Sabbath is a classic one.

Hence, as we approach the time of Christ's ministry, we find that the Sabbath, due to man's sincere but exaggerated interpretations, had become not a joy but a burden— something not originally intended by God. As a result, Christ had to set out to clarify the true "spirit" of the law.

New Testament Church

There is great emphasis on the Sabbath throughout the Old Testament. Much is also written about Sabbath observance in the New Testament. The emphasis changes, however, from a nationalistic system of communal Sabbath-keeping, fulfilling the letter of the law, to an individual responsibility of personal worship on the Sabbath, fulfilling the spirit of the law. The issues discussed in the New Testament *never* deal with *whether* the Sabbath should be kept. This would be utterly impossible, as we will see. Rather, the questions deal with *how* the Sabbath should be kept.

The seventh-day Sabbath is observed today by only a few, because it is generally assumed that the New Testament shows the abolition of any need to keep the Sabbath. This assumption is rejected by

the Church of God. Granted, there is no explicit statement such as, "Christians must keep the Sabbath." When we actually go back to the New Testament environment, however, the fact we should keep the Sabbath is so plain that no such statement is required.

A clear understanding of the Sabbath in the New Testament requires a brief summary of the state of Sabbath observance among Jews during Christ's time.

G.F. Moore, the well-known scholar of early Judaism, states: "The two fundamental observances of Judaism are circumcision and the Sabbath" (*Judaism*, II, 16). This was as true in the first century A.D. as at any other time. Both practices were referred to as "signs" (Hebrew *'ot*) and "eternal covenants" (*berit 'olam*) in the Old Testament. First Maccabees 2:32ff describes a group of Jews who were slaughtered because they refused to defend themselves on the Sabbath. As a result, Mattathias and his followers determined to fight in self-defense on that day if necessary, but even then they would not take the offensive (I Macc. 2:41; II Macc. 8:26ff).

The book of Jubilees (2nd century B.C.) gives some detailed regulations for the Sabbath. Things forbidden included preparing food, taking anything between houses, drawing water, riding on an animal or ship, making war, or having sexual relations (2:29–30; 50:8, 12). The Qumran community had a number of the same regulations. Other prohibitions included going more than a thousand cubits from one's town, helping an animal out of a pit or in giving birth, and apparently even using an instrument to save a human being from water or fire (Damascus Covenant 10.14–11.18).

Recent scholarly studies have emphasized the extreme strictness in, and rigorous administration of, Sabbath observance in the days of Jesus, even when compared to the later rabbinic writings in the Mishnah.

Therefore, when Jesus was called into account for doing certain things on the Sabbath, it was not for violating specified Old Testament prohibitions, but for disavowal of non-inspired, traditional regulations concerning the Sabbath. The Old Testament did not forbid one to pick ears of grain on the Sabbath to eat on the spot. Yet when Jesus and His disciples did this He was called to account. The reason? Because the religious leaders classified picking ears as "reaping" and rubbing loose the grain as "threshing."

The incident of the disciples plucking grain to eat in the fields (Mt. 12:1–8; Mk. 2:23–28; Lk. 6:1–5) was no violation of property law since this was specifically permitted in the Old Testament (Deut. 23:25). They were accused only of Sabbath-breaking. Jesus did not defend their actions on the grounds that the Sabbath was done away. Rather, He used relevant analogies: David and the show-bread (KJV—"bread of the Presence," RSV) and the priests in the temple. It was only after He had shown that the actions of the disciples were not a true violation of the Sabbath that He asserted, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:27–28). By this means He showed not that the Sabbath was done away but rather the correct spirit in which to keep the Sabbath. Jesus was clearly a Sabbath-keeper, not a Sabbath-breaker.

Similarly, it was forbidden by extra-biblical Jewish law to treat a sickness when the sick person's life was not in immediate danger. Although being watched by the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:9–14; Mk. 3:1–6; Lk. 6:6–11). To defend Himself He used the analogy of pulling a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath. This shows that it was not His intent to break the Sabbath but to show that relieving suffering was consistent with the purpose of the day.

Similarly, when He healed a cripple who had been ill 38 years, He told the man to pick up his pallet and go home (Jn. 5:8). This carrying of a few ounces of weight was in no way a violation of the law against bearing a burden on the Sabbath (Jer. 17:21, 22, 27). It was only in the opinion of certain onlooking religious leaders that He had violated the Sabbath. The incident is in perfect harmony with the other Sabbath discussions given in the gospels. (Other healings are also described in such passages as John 9; Luke 13:10–13; 14:2–4.)

One passage is undisputed, at least insofar as a clear reference to Sabbath observance *after* Jesus' own lifetime is concerned. This is Matthew 24:20: "Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath." This admonition is directed at Jesus' own followers. And such instructions would have had little place in a non-Sabbath-keeping community.

Scholars are almost unanimous in agreeing this refers at least to a time as late as the 66–70 A.D. war against Rome, long after Jesus' death. (Should this prophecy have a dual fulfilment, it would affirm that Jesus also knew the Sabbath would be kept by His people years later in the "time of the end.")

In addition, Christ's own example of attending the weekly synagogue is significant. In Luke 4, Jesus attends the synagogue on the Sabbath day in His own city "as His custom was" (v. 16). Evidently it had not been His custom heretofore to *speak* in the synagogue since the listeners were astonished at his teaching. This indicates He attended regular services as a means of Sabbath observance rather than just for the purpose of teaching. And it is impossible to over emphasize the importance of Christ's own example since He told His disciples to teach all nations those things that He had commanded them to observe (Mt. 28:20).

Thus, we may conclude that the picture of Jesus as a lawbreaker or antinomian radical, while maintained in some fundamentalist circles, is easily refuted by the Scriptures and is also generally rejected by scholarship.

The argument that Christians today don't need to do what Jesus Himself did and taught is refuted by Matthew 28:20, as mentioned above, where the disciples are told to teach what Jesus commanded them. Furthermore, Matthew 11:13 shows that "all the prophets and the law" looked forward to the coming of Jesus; this means that Jesus' own actions and teachings were more than simply fulfilling the Sinai Covenant—they were setting the proper example for all Christians for all time.

It is abundantly clear the Jerusalem Church never gave up Sabbath observance during the New Testament era. On Paul's last visit to Jerusalem (about 58–60 A.D.), James and all the elders of the Church told Paul how the thousands of converted Jews "are all zealous ["ardent upholders," Moffatt] of the law" (Acts 21:20). In such an environment, it is inconceivable the cherished and holy Sabbath would no longer be kept.

In his letter to the Church at Rome in this same time period, 55–59 A.D., Paul reminds them that the Gentiles "have been made partakers of *their spiritual things*" in a direct reference to the poor saints in the *Jerusalem* Church for whom Paul was asking physical contributions (Rom. 15:26–27). One cannot imagine that "partaking of their spiritual things" would not include worship on the Sabbath, since it was fully revered by the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and constituted a significant part of their spiritual lives.

The first ministerial conference in the apostolic Church is highly informative both for what was said and for what was not said (Acts 15). In the year 49–50 A.D., the issue of whether circumcision was required for salvation caused such dissension in the Church that Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders. Various issues of current interest were discussed—issues such as idolatry, fornication, and certain eating laws—but the Sabbath was not discussed at all. It was not relevant. Why? Because it simply was not an issue. Nobody in *all* Christianity was at this time teaching the Sabbath was not to be observed and kept holy by the Church—in fact, just the opposite appears to have been the case. James, who seems to have been in charge, concluded by referring to what was actually happening in that crucial time claims: "For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues" (Acts 15:21). As S. Bacchiocchi, a scholar who has researched the question, writes:

"We should note that James' statement refers specifically to the Gentile Christians outside Judea. It is therefore significant to notice the Gentile Christians (possibly former 'proselytes or God-fearers') were still attending synagogue, listening to the reading and exposition of the Scriptures 'every Sabbath.' The total silence of the Council on such an important matter as a new day of worship [or elimination or even denigration of the long-standing day of worship] would seem to indicate such a problem had not yet arisen."

Thus it can be seen that Acts 15:21 is a very interesting scripture, albeit, perhaps, somewhat enigmatic. James does not make a big issue about what he is saying; apparently, he does not have to. He is simply explaining why this major conference would only rule on a few things for the Gentile Christians to abstain from: "pollution of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood" (Acts 15:20). Obviously, there were other things Christians had to abstain from, such as dishonoring parents, killing, lying, etc., but James is simply say-

ing all of these other responsibilities of Christians were well known since God's laws were read every Sabbath in the synagogue.

As far as circumcision was concerned, a specific Church ruling was made not to require it for Gentile Christians. The apostles and elders merely *affirmed* what God had shown them, both through His actions in the lives of the uncircumcised and in the Scriptures. Specifically, the justification for this decision was Peter's observation that God made no distinction between Israelites and uncircumcised Gentiles in giving them the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:8), and James's noting the fulfilment of the prophets who "from old" identified a restoration—including Gentiles—who would seek the Lord and be called by His name (Acts 15:15–18).

The traditional anti-Sabbath rejoinder to Acts 15 asks how the requirement for Sabbath observance can be left in while at the same time the requirement for circumcision is ruled out. Or phrased another way, why isn't the abrogation of the Sabbath commandment included *with* the abrogation of circumcision, which symbolized the Sinai covenant?

The answer is almost fully contained in the question itself. Circumcision of the flesh indeed symbolized the Sinaitic covenant, which had now been superseded by the terms of the New Covenant. But the Sabbath far transcended the covenant at Sinai in *both* directions: it was instituted at Creation, long before Sinai; and it also foreshadows the future millennial rest in the Kingdom of God. The Sabbath, in fact, shall be observed following the return of Christ when the fullness of the New Covenant shall spread over all the earth (Is. 66:23).

The picture of the early Gentile Church in Acts illustrates continued Sabbath observance. From Acts 13 we learn that the apostles Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia on the Sabbath (v. 14). They were so successful that they were asked back the next Sabbath. Acts 13:42–43 is then an interesting passage. It shows that the Jews rejected Paul's strong message and went *out* of the synagogue. But the *Gentiles* wanted to hear more and beseeched Paul to preach to them *the next Sabbath*. Here are Gentiles, not asking to meet on a Sunday or a weekday evening, but on *the Sabbath*. The next Sabbath almost the whole city came to hear Paul speak (v. 44). Notice that the Jews were not a part of this; they were angry with Paul (v. 45). This was a *Gentile* meeting (v. 48)—on the Sabbath! They knew the significance of the Sabbath day. If Paul wanted to meet with the Gentiles on a Sunday, he could easily have said: "We can just assemble tomorrow on the Lord's day." But this is not the case. They all waited a *whole week*—then on the following Sabbath day we find Paul preaching to a whole Gentile city! He was not trying to impress the Jews. They had turned from him. But Paul kept the Sabbath, and here endorses it for the entire Gentile world.

In Acts 16:13 Paul goes out to a place of prayer (apparently because there was no synagogue). It was, in fact, Paul's custom to attend the synagogue on the Sabbath (Acts 17:1–2). While these occasions were used as opportunities to spread the gospel, as would be natural, they are certainly also further examples of Paul's worshipping God specifically on the Sabbath.

The point that needs to be understood is meeting on the Sabbath was completely normal for the Gentiles. There was nothing extraordinary about it, nothing to make an issue out of. What we find recorded in the book of Acts are some matter-of-fact comments by Luke concerning what occurred. It was common knowledge—and Theophilus (to whom the book was written, Acts 1:1) took for granted this fact—that the entire Church, Gentile and Jewish, met on the Sabbath as spiritual Israelites. This is what would be expected: Paul preaching on the Sabbath and then meeting with Gentiles on the same day. It was nothing unusual. So, after examining Acts alongside the gospels there remains no teaching—not even a hint of one—that the Sabbath day was removed or changed. On the contrary, we find Jesus and Paul keeping it, teaching on it and meeting with others to worship God—all on the Sabbath.

It is also significant the Sabbath is *called* the Sabbath. This was *not* the common Greek way of referring to the seventh day of the week. So, Luke is actually giving additional meaning to the Sabbath by referring to it by name. He does not call it the "Jewish Sabbath" but simply "the Sabbath." (The New Testament writers, in fact, borrowed the Hebrew—or Aramaic—word.)

Acts was written years after the resurrection of Jesus and the establishment of the Church in Gentile as well as Jewish areas. If the Sabbath had been removed, it should have been long since gone. The date was probably in the middle or late 60's

A.D. It was not common for Gentiles to call the seventh day of the week "the Sabbath," any more than it is common in the United States to call Saturday the Sabbath. (And Theophilus, to whom the book was written, could have been a Gentile.) So, when Luke says Paul went into the synagogue on the *Sabbath*, he is commenting in effect that this was God's Sabbath or rest day, for he calls it just that. The connotation would be the same today if we heard someone call Saturday "the Sabbath"; we would think it significant and probably assume the person kept Saturday as his Sabbath or rest day. The same goes for Luke 23:56. The women rested on the Sabbath "*according to the [fourth] commandment*." This is not meant as a mere historical narrative but a comment, or affirmation that the day actually is the Sabbath. Calling the seventh day "the Sabbath," then, is very significant, especially around 63 A.D. when Luke wrote his Gospel.

There is more concrete evidence in Acts that Paul and all the apostles kept the Sabbath. Perhaps the strongest proof is the Jews never accused them of breaking it. Notice in John 5:9–18 and 9:13–16. Here these men thought Jesus broke the Sabbath by healing on that day. They wanted to kill Him for this and claimed the legal right to do so. This was serious. It was a major issue to them. Then, in the latter passage, some of them conclude that Jesus could not be of God, because He did not keep the Sabbath. What we find in Acts are similar vicious attacks on Paul but a stark contrast regarding accusations about not keeping the Sabbath.

The Jews from Palestine were really after Paul. They wanted to find something against him. He was constantly under attack. But he was never *accused* of breaking the Sabbath as was Jesus. This proves he never even *appeared* to break it; much less did he actually teach against it. Paul, in reality, kept more of the laws of the Sinaitic Covenant than he had to (Acts 21:17-27). So obviously he kept the Sabbath, which was considered so much more important. Paul was not lying or giving witness to something that was not true. James was not fooled. Acts 21:24 is true: that *is* what Paul did—he kept the law even to the extent of "the customs." So it is plain he also kept the Sabbath. The Ten Commandments or moral living are not even in question. James was not implying in verses 21–24 that Paul was Sabbath-breaking, or lying, or killing, or otherwise breaking the law. There would have been no question on those big matters. The question was how many of the ceremonies and rituals should a converted Jew continue to keep?

We can be absolutely sure the Jerusalem Church kept the Sabbath. James and the others had *favor* with the people—even priests obeyed the faith (Acts 2:47; 6:7). This would have been utterly impossible if the Church had been meeting on Sunday (or any other day) and breaking the Sabbath. If that was the case, it would have been mentioned as a major accusation against them, and problem for the Church. The Church was indeed persecuted by the religious leaders of the day, but *not* for Sabbath-breaking.

Scholars recognize the Palestinian Christian churches continued in Sabbath observance even after the break with Judaism. While the apostle Paul is considered by some as an instigator of a full-scale departure from Jewish law, such an interpretation depends in part on interpretations of documents outside and later than the New Testament.

In several instances Paul appeals to Jesus' teachings as backing for his own commands. We find three such major examples in 1 Corinthians alone: in chapter 7 (on marriage); in chapter 9 (on support of the ministry); and in chapter 11 (on the "Lord's Supper"). If Jesus had done away with the Sabbath, it is inconceivable that Paul would have been ignorant of this fact. Yet if Jesus had done away with the Sabbath and Paul knew of it, *it is absolutely inconceivable that Paul would not have cited this as proof* of his own alleged teachings against the Sabbath—using it for support—but he didn't because Jesus never eliminated the observance of the Sabbath.

Certain scriptures in Paul's writings are often adduced as proof of his alleged attitude that Sabbath observance is unnecessary or even evil. For example, it is often held that Romans 14:5–6 shows that it does not matter which day one keeps holy, but this is actually nowhere stated. Since eating is mentioned several times in the passage, some commentators suggest it may be a question of fast days or something else to do with food. Verse 5 speaks of esteeming one day above another but says nothing about the reason for the preference. The word "esteem" (Greek *krino*) is not otherwise used for keeping a holy day. Similarly, in verse 6, the word *phroneo* ("regardeth," KJV; "observes," RSV) is not otherwise used to refer to the observance of fes-

tivals. To use this passage as proof that Paul no longer believed Sabbath observance to be necessary requires anti-Sabbatarians to demonstrate this is in fact what lies behind the statement—something that has yet to be done.

The reference to "days, and months, and seasons, and years" in Galatians 4:10 is frequently applied to the Jewish Sabbath and holy day observance. The basis for this is the apparent Jewish identity of those causing problems in Galatia. That the troublemakers had certain characteristics that would gain them the label "Jewish" is correct (e.g. circumcision), but this still does not delineate the situation. Was it Pharisaic, was it Essenic, was it some sort of syncretistic group? What part did astrology play? What was the makeup of the Galatian congregation? Such things are often assumed rather than proved.

The fact is, we do not know anything about the group causing the problem other than what the epistle itself tells us. To assume more than this is not reliable evidence. Why does Paul speak of their "turning back" to the "weak and miserable *stoicheia*" (v. 9)? These Galatians do not seem to be former Jews, since they are receiving circumcision— something Jews would already have. Unless one takes the "turning back" as purely a metaphorical expression, one would assume they are going back to their former pagan conditions.

Further evidence is found in the vocabulary here. Why would one speak of "days" (*hemerai*), "months" (*menai*), "seasons" (*kairoi*) and "years" (*eniautoi*), if one had the Old Testament festivals in mind? One would expect to see "Sabbath," "festival days" (*heorte*), or similar words but not vague references to "days" and problematic and unspecified comments about "seasons" and "years." It is strange that Paul manages not to use a single normal word for the weekly or annual celebrations, if that is what he had in mind. We can only conclude the passage cannot legitimately be used as evidence of Sabbath abolition. Indeed, in the Gentile world, up to one third of the days of the year were special in one way or another, with certain restrictions, etc. In addition, certain months were considered sacred. The Jews never observed any months.

Colossians 2:16 is the first scripture to give a certain reference to the Sabbath and annual holy days. Yet again we have a problem with background. We evidently have a syncretistic group exploiting the Church at Colossae. Certain ascetic practices of pagan philosophies are mentioned (Col. 2:8, 18–23). Therefore, it is not surprising that Paul says, "Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink," since some people apparently *were* passing judgment. Of course, eating and drinking are only a "shadow" (forerunner) of what is to come, but the solid "body" (ultimate goal) belongs to Christ. Does that mean we should no longer eat and drink? Hardly. Paul is showing the ascetic practices some wished to enforce were of minimal substance. Any eating or abstinence is not the end but only a means to an end. A Sabbath observer could say the same about the Sabbath and holy days. They *are*—not were—a shadow of what is to come; and therefore are still important and necessary, just as eating and drinking are.

What is Paul specifically instructing the Colossian Church? From our historical perspective, it is difficult to know for sure. Could Paul be encouraging the Colossians since they were being troubled by pagan Gentiles who were criticizing new converts *for keeping* the Sabbath? Or was Paul allaying the fears of brethren who were being criticized by strict, proselytizing Jews for the manner in which they kept the Sabbath? (Since Jesus taught the Sabbath as a *blessing for man* and not a *burden*, some extremely zealous Judaic factions might have claimed the new converts were breaking the Sabbath when in fact these converts were keeping it precisely as Jesus Himself had done.) In either case, Colossians 2:16 transforms into a clear statement evidencing Gentile Christians *were* keeping the Sabbath. What is absolutely certain: Paul is not speaking against Sabbath observance. If he were teaching against the Sabbath in Colossians 2, the discussion in the New Testament would have been enormous. No such discussion or dissension exists.

The fact that Paul expected Gentiles to keep the law is demonstrated in many scriptures throughout the book of Romans (e.g. Rom. 3:31; 7:12, 22; etc.). Romans 2:25–29 is especially interesting and direct, though often overlooked. Here uncircumcised *Gentiles* are admonished to be circumcised of the heart (v. 29) and become Jews inwardly by keeping "the righteousness of the law" (v. 26) by fulfilling the law (v. 27). (Obviously Paul could not have meant the full Sinaitic Covenant in his use of the term "law" here, since circumcision was a part of the law.) Only with God's Holy Spirit, through Christ, can a human being fulfil the righteousness

of the law (Rom. 8:4) and "delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22).

Aside from the actual New Testament verses in which Sabbath observance is directly mentioned, the question about the Sabbath law not being repeated, as a direct command must be addressed. A comparison of the treatment in the New Testament of the law of circumcision and the Sabbath (the two great pillars of the Jewish faith in Christ's time) will illustrate the problem, and supply the solution.

Sabbath observance was a practice among all Jews, in Palestine as well as in the diaspora. In fact, Sabbath observance was very influential in the Roman world as a whole among non-Jews.*

Circumcision was also a major pillar of the Jewish faith. For a male to become a full proselyte to Judaism, circumcision was required. Not unnaturally, few males were willing to take this course, yet this did not prevent many from becoming "God-fearers" or "semi-proselytes." This was especially popular outside Palestine—in the diaspora. It was considered sufficient to accept belief in one God and adopt a minimum of other commandments, such as the Sabbath, the dietary laws, and basic ethical requirements. Even though such individuals were not converts, strictly speaking, they were encouraged by Jewish leaders and evidently expected to share in the favor of God as much as Jews by birth (see for example, G.F. Moore, *Judaism* II, 325; G. Bornkamm, *Paul* 10; K.G. Kuhn, TDNT VI, 731).

However, even the "God-fearers" were not forced to experience removal of the foreskin to observe the Sabbath, the second major tenet of Judaism. This poses a rather obvious but crucial question: *If circumcision—which was not a universal requirement for Gentiles anyway—is such a major issue in the New Testament, why is the Sabbath not an issue of controversy?*

We have to remember we are not dealing with a minor point. On an unimportant issue, the silence of the New Testament might be purely accidental. But we are dealing with one of the two *major pillars* of the Jewish religion at the time.

It hardly needs pointing out, that circumcision was an important issue in the early years of the apostolic Church. So long as the only new converts were Jews, no problem arose. But it was not long before the conversion of Cornelius occurred (Acts 10–11). God clearly gave His Spirit without requiring circumcision. When Peter was called into question about it, his answer seemed to have quieted any objections.

However, it was not completely settled, because it came up again, requiring the council of Acts 15. Even then circumcision must have been a problem, because Paul continues to mention it. Those troubling the Galatians were evidently teaching circumcision, so Paul, in exasperation, sarcastically wishes they would slip and castrate themselves (Gal. 5:12). He says many times that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision—physically—is of any spiritual consequence (1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:6). It is *spiritual* circumcision—of the heart—that counts (Rom. 2:25ff).

This "pillar" of Judaism was so important that it received considerable attention throughout the New Testament. Despite precedents in conversion without circumcision, the subject was debated quite vigorously in the early Church. Yet the other pillar—the Sabbath—does not receive anywhere near comparable treatment. A silence on this point seems hardly accidental. Considering the historical situation, silence undoubtedly means the Sabbath was a nonissue—never challenged or questioned. The required conclusion must therefore be that Sabbath observance was both taught and obeyed by the early Church.

Sabbath observance was so important in the Jewish religion that there are statements in Talmudic literature to the effect that Sabbath observance is the equivalent of the Abrahamic Covenant, and the law of the Sabbath was said to be equal to all other laws and commandments in the Torah! (*Mekhilta* 63; *Pesikta Rabbti* 23; Palestinian Talmud *Berachot* 3; *Nedarim* 38; *Exodus Rabba* 25.) Although these are post-first century texts, they illustrate what is also clear from the earliest

* This is clear from the number of references in various writers in the first centuries B.C. and A.D. Horace shows that many people had "joined" the Jews or at least were careful of what they did on the Sabbath to avoid offending Jewish scruples (*Satires* 1.4.14ff; 1.9.60ff). Ovid indicates that many young Roman maidens frequented the synagogue on the Sabbath (*Ars amatoria* 1.75 and 415). Other writers indicating widespread Jewish influence, often with Sabbath observance of some sort, include Tibullus (1.3.13ff); Seneca (*Epistle* 2.40); and Juvenal (*Satire* 14.96ff). One historian summarized the situation as follows: "an observance of the Sabbath ... became very common in some quarters of Rome under the Empire" (Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, 84).

records: The acknowledged importance of the Sabbath to Judaism is highly relevant for achieving an accurate understanding of New Testament teaching regarding Sabbath observance for the Christian.

The enormous importance of the Sabbath in first-century Judaism is powerful corroboratory evidence that neither Jesus nor any of His apostles ever "did away" with Sabbath observance on the day God created for rest and worship. The few scriptures (primarily in Paul's writings) often quoted in an attempt to end the obligation of Christians to keep the Sabbath, pale by comparison with the overwhelming significance of the Sabbath. If the apostles had dared to eliminate Sabbath observance, surely a gargantuan conflict would have exploded in the New Testament record. Compare the major controversy in the New Testament Church over circumcision (e.g., Acts 15), which was declared unnecessary or optional for Christians, with the described minor controversy over *how a Christian should observe* the Sabbath (in contradistinction to the "customary" rigorous regulations of common Jewish law).

Since the Sabbath was considered by the Jews to be so important—as important as all the rest of the law put together in some circles (see above)—*if* Jesus and His apostles had taught and practiced the total abrogation of the Sabbath commandment, as is often claimed, then the religious controversy and disputations should perforce have filled the Gospels, the book of Acts and all the epistles. *There is no such enormous controversy in the New Testament records, and therefore we can only conclude the Sabbath was not abrogated!*

This would also explain why there aren't repeated reaffirmations of the Sabbath as a command of God. It is mentioned, of course (as already shown), but everybody in New Testament times already knew or believed in the importance of the Sabbath. There was not the slightest doubt or uncertainty. To emphasize Sabbath-keeping in the New Testament would have been like the proverbial "carrying coals to Newcastle" or "taking ice to the Eskimos in winter." The issue that Jesus (and later the apostles) addressed was not whether to observe the Sabbath—it had always been revered as the fourth of the Ten Commandments—but rather, *how* to observe the Sabbath in the light of the restrictive concepts of the day.

Commonly available historical scholarship testifies Christians kept the Sabbath even after New Testament times. Eusebius reports that even the liberal wing of the Jewish Christians "shared in the impiety of the former class [radical wing], in that they were equally zealous to insist on the literal observance of the law." S. Bacchiocchi writes: around 80–90 A.D. "the Rabbinical authorities reconstituted at Jamnia [after the fall of Jerusalem] introduced a test, in the form of a curse to be pronounced in the famous daily prayer *Shemoneh Esreh* by any participant in the synagogue service, against the Christians. The fact that a test had to be introduced to detect the presence of Christians in the synagogue would seem to indicate, as J. Parkes observes, that Judeo-Christians still frequent the synagogue. It would therefore appear that no radical break with Judaism took place until the year 135 A.D."

At some point after 135 A.D., when the Romans crushed the Bar Kokhba revolt and forbade the traditional observance of many Jewish laws, including the Sabbath, the new Gentile leaders of the Jerusalem Church began to adopt the weekly Sunday observance, thereby establishing Sunday as their day of worship. This became necessary in order to eliminate any possible association with Judaism—and any resultant suspicion—in the eyes of the Roman overlords.

Nevertheless, the observance of the Sabbath was such a strong tradition that it continued alongside Sunday for several centuries even in large portions of Catholic Christianity. For example, the so-called *Apostolic Constitutions* (about 375–400) exhort the faithful to assemble "on the Sabbath day and . . . the Lord's day" (2.59.1). Both days are to be feasts (7.23.2); Christian slaves are to be allowed to rest on both of them (8.33.1). Even though Sunday is given a slightly higher value, the Sabbath is to be celebrated as the memorial of Creation and a time for godliness (7.36.1–2).

One of the great Catholic theologians of the east, Gregory of Nyssa (about 335–394), writes, "With what face will you dare to behold the Lord's Day if you have despised the Sabbath? . . . For they are sister days" (De Castig 2). Even the noted Alexandrian theologian Origen, the source of so much of later Catholic theology, wrote in his *Hom. in Num.* 23.4:

"Leaving on one side, therefore, the Jewish observances of the Sabbath, let us see of what kind the

observance of the Sabbath ought to be for the Christian. On the Sabbath no worldly affairs ought to be undertaken. If, therefore, you abstain from all secular works, and do nothing worldly, but employ yourself in spiritual works, and come to church and give ear to the Scripture lections and to sermons, . . . this is the observance of the Sabbath for the Christian."

Even as late as the fifth century, we find the Sabbath still being remembered in Catholic Christianity, with the notable exceptions of Rome and Alexandria. The church historian, Socrates, writing about 440, states:

"Almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians at Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this" (5.22).

His contemporary Sozomen similarly tells us, "The people of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as the first day of the week, which custom is never observed at Rome or at Alexandria" (7.19).

Sabbath Analogy of God's Plan

The Sabbath day has two great overall purposes according to the Bible: 1) It looks back as a witness to the physical creation; 2) it looks forward as a shadow to the spiritual rest and creation. (A third purpose can be listed as well: the Sabbath was to be remembrance of the God who brought Israel out of Egypt, Deut. 5:15.) God does things in type and antitype, in "shadow" and in "substance."

When God created the earth in *six* days and then rested on the seventh, this completed the physical creation. There is no more physical creation going on. The works are finished as Genesis 2:2–3 and Hebrews 4:3 attest. So the Sabbath day looks back to that Creation, the week of the physical creation (Ex. 20:11; 31:17). It is then a memorial, which helps us remember the Creator who made everything. It keeps Him fully in mind every week.

But God also has a great spiritual plan—a spiritual creation—which is now in progress (2 Cor. 5:17). There is a new Creation, and the Sabbath also looks forward to that. Hebrews 4:1–11 refers to a *rest* for God's people. It is yet a future rest we are to strive to enter—the ultimate rest in the Kingdom of God. The seven-day week (v. 4) is a picture of this spiritual week God has instituted. God rested—so man shall too. Therefore, the Sabbath day each week also looks forward to that *future rest*—when the whole earth shall be at rest—when all shall be taught the way of God. Hebrews 4 shows this clearly, and verse 9 is particularly relevant. It says, "There remaineth *therefore* a rest [s*abbatismos*—"sabbatizing"] to the people of God." So, because of the future rest (*katapausis*) spiritual Israel is to enter, there remains for us a *sabbatismos* or "sabbatizing." This means we will keep that future Sabbath of millennial rest as we now keep the weekly Sabbath to look forward to it.

In other words, the Sabbath is both a memorial and a shadow. It is a *memorial* of Creation and a *shadow* of the coming future rest of God's people following the return of Jesus Christ. The Sabbath did not originate with the law of Moses or with the Sinaitic covenant with physical Israel—so it does not pass with that covenant; rather it originated with Creation and looks back as a memorial to it. The Sabbath is also a shadow, looking forward to the yet future time of the Millennium. A shadow remains as long as the substance is still future. So it *remains*—looking *forward* to that time. And when that time comes, the Sabbath shall still be kept (Is. 66:23), although no longer as a shadow but as a memorial to the then contemporary reality of Christ's millennial rule.

It was a widespread belief in both intertestamental Judaism and the early Church that the seven days of Creation were an analogy of God's plan for man. This belief held the first six days represent the entirety of human history in which man is allowed to go his own way under the sway of Satan the devil, and the seventh day on which God rested represents the millennial rest when God Himself sets up His own rule and Kingdom over the earth. Such a Kingdom is described in a number of Old Testament passages (e.g. Is. 2:2–4; 11; Mic. 4:1–8).

Moreover, two New Testament passages refer explicitly to this future Kingdom. Revelation 20:1–10 describes a time when Jesus Christ Himself returns to the earth and has Satan bound. The righteous will rule. The time of this rule is specifically described as "a thousand years" (vv. 4, 6). As we have seen, Hebrews 3:7–4:11 draws a

lengthy analogy with the Sabbath rest which physical Israel had never entered into. Christians have a chance to enter into this rest if they do not harden their hearts as the Israelites did. In Hebrews 4:9 this eschatological rest is explicitly connected with the seventh-day Sabbath rest.

Sabbath in the Millennium

As already mentioned, the weekly Sabbath day was taken as a sign of a millennial "Sabbath" of one thousand years in which God (Jesus Christ) would rule directly over the whole earth. The Kingdom of God was already awaited by the Old Testament prophets. Some of the descriptions of it include references to worship on the weekly and annual Sabbaths. For example, Isaiah 66:10ff describes the restoration of Jerusalem as the capital of the world and the rule of God over all nations. The righteous are vindicated and rebellions punished. Verse 23 states, "From one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD." Sabbath worship is envisioned for all peoples, not just for Israelites. (The new moon was often treated as a semi-holiday because of its importance for calendric purposes. However, it is nowhere explicitly designated a holy day. See further discussion under "Annual Holy Days.")

Ezekiel 40–48 describes Israel and the future Temple in prophetic vision. Regular observance of the weekly Sabbath and other holy days shall be established alongside a reinstituted priesthood and temple ritual. The Passover and Feast of Tabernacles are discussed in 45:21–25. The weekly Sabbath is mentioned in 44:24; 45:17; 46:1, 3, 4, 12. Then, as now, there shall be physical human beings with the same basic needs human beings have always had. The physical and spiritual needs for the Sabbath shall be the same as they are now and as they have been in the past.

Principles for Observing the Sabbath

Genesis 2:3 reveals that God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it—set it apart as a holy day—because He rested from all His work. God did not rest because He was tired (cf. Is. 40:28); He rested because He was creating something new by the very act of His resting. He was putting His holy presence into the seventh day of the week and setting the precedent for what all mankind should later do.

The Sabbath in the Sinaitic covenant and in later administrations was often hedged about with very strict legal ordinances about what could or could not be done on that day. These regulations had the purpose of teaching respect for the day and helping lead to the proper understanding of the day and its intent. Jesus looked beyond these legalistic ordinances surrounding the day and pointed to the true purpose of the day.

The Sabbath is a definite day, the seventh day of the week, established by God at creation. To alter its observance to one day, or just any day in seven diminishes its original meaning. Of course, modern man is aware of geographical locations in which the sun does not set below the horizon every 24 hours. The polar regions in summer are one example; outer space is another. Yet, just as individuals in such locations do not lose track of time in relation to the rest of the world, the basic time of the seventh day of the week on earth can still be known. Despite the lack of a clear time of sunset, an appropriate demarcation of the Sabbath day can still be determined.

That period of time defined broadly as "evening and morning" was *blessed* and *hallowed*. To hallow or sanctify is *to make holy or set apart for holy use*. When originally defined, the days of creation week were defined only in the broad terms of "evening and morning," not specifically as the time of sunset to sunset. It is the individual's responsibility, whatever the local geographic configuration or latitude, to determine as best he is able to the meaning of "evening" which begins a day. The Church members and ministry are able to assist with such determinations (of "when" the Sabbath begins), and application of the scriptural principles for making the Sabbath a delight. Scandinavians certainly have more need of a broader meaning of "evening" than do people who live in the tropics.

Christians must keep the day in the spirit. And a true spiritual understanding of the meaning and purpose of the day removes the need for detailed regulations; indeed, detailed regulations cannot substitute for a proper spiritual understanding. To attempt to define details of Sabbath do's and don'ts would be of little use and only confuse those seeking to gain understanding of the real intent about the

Sabbath, which must come from the Spirit of God. Yet some guidelines are necessary—especially for the new convert. Therefore, a rather broad discussion is given here as a means of pointing to a proper understanding of the day.

The Sabbath is a special day, a *holy* day, a day specifically devoted to God and spiritual matters. It is not a day for regular business (Is. 58:13) but a time to turn from the cares and concerns of the mundane life to the things of God. It is a day in which to rejoice, to enjoy, resting and having time for God and one's family. The concept of rest does not necessarily mean inactivity though, since spiritual activity is quite important. Physical activity *per se* is not prohibited since certain kinds may be conducive to a better observance of the day (Mt. 12:1).

Jesus' example of doing good on the Sabbath is a good indication physical activity as such is not prohibited (e.g. Mt. 12:9–13; Jn. 9:1–14). Doing good by helping others is very much in keeping with the intent of the Sabbath. Relieving the sufferings or taking care of the immediate needs of others is at the heart of Christian love. Since the purpose of the Sabbath is to lead a more profound understanding of this godly love, activity which promotes this is certainly in harmony with the Sabbath command. Doing good is something Christians will be doing on other days of the week, too. In this way, building houses for people—e.g., through the Habitat for Humanity charity—is an example of doing good that is best done on other days of the week, to not conflict with the clear instruction to rest and worship God on the Sabbath.

On the other hand, whatever does not contribute to a proper use of the Sabbath is out of keeping with it. Doing one's normal business, earning a living, becoming burdened with the mundane cares of daily life, following purely physical pursuits to the exclusion of spiritual ones, or regularly participating in activities which prevent the needed rest of mind and body, are contrary to the purpose of the Sabbath. These all defeat its very intent—the reason why it was given to man—because they do not generate the benefits the Sabbath was created to give.

It is not the responsibility of the Church to create an encyclopaedic handbook for Sabbath observance. The Church teaches the *broad principles* and the members apply them in situations as they arise. The Church cannot legislate on every last situation that may be encountered. Each member must be educated and encouraged to make *personal value judgments* according to his own character and conscience within the general guidelines provided by the Church.

It is the duty of the ministry of the Church to teach the profound spiritual *meaning* of the seventh day from a biblical perspective. The ministry must teach both what the *letter* of the law says and what the *spirit* of the Sabbath law is.

The most important declaration regarding Sabbath Observance was Jesus' statement "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:27). God created the Sabbath day to serve man—not vice versa. Man was not intended to be *enslaved* to a period of time. Sabbath observance should not be allowed to become an end in itself. Rather, the day is to serve and *help* those who observe it. The Sabbath was created, as Christ pointed out, *for the service of mankind*. It was the day, upon which God "rested"—that is, ceased from His labors of creation—"and was refreshed" (Ex. 31:17). The example is clear: God rested; therefore man also should rest from his weekly labors. When man observes the Sabbath day, he is imitating his Creator and commemorating the creation itself.

The Israelites were instructed to cease from their usual food-gathering labors on the seventh day as God Himself had set the example (Ex. 16:29–30). The day was to be a time of "solemn rest, a holy Sabbath" (verse 23).

In the giving of the Decalogue at Sinai, the command concerning the Sabbath became the "fourth commandment." The Israelites were instructed to keep the seventh day holy:

"Remember the Sabbath day, *to keep it holy*. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Ex. 20:8–11, emphasis ours).

The theocracy of Israel was primarily an agrarian society. "Work" most often meant farm labor of one kind or another. That is why the commandment

included cattle or oxen (cf. Deut. 5:14). In context, it is clear that labor, which involved planting, plowing, and harvesting, is what was being forbidden on the seventh day (cf. Ex. 34:21). There is a parallel between this *kind* of labor and the work of God at Creation—hence the discussion of Creation in Exodus 20:11.

As the community of Israel developed sophistication within the context of a national theocracy, the implications of the fourth commandment extended into other areas. In the special "Sabbath covenant" section (Ex. 31:12–17), the command to rest applied to "any work" (v. 14). In short, *the Sabbath is a day when God's people cease from their usual workday labors as did God*. The fact that we are imitating God's example when we do *shows our special relationship with God*—it shows we are "His people."

Isaiah 58 sheds more light on the meaning of the Sabbath day in Israel:

"If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure; or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the LORD" (Is. 58:13–14).

In short, the Sabbath is *God's day*. *It is a day devoted to God and to godly activities*. It is holy. It is hallowed. It is a day to be honored. It is a time to "delight in the LORD" as opposed to one's own mundane business affairs. It should be carefully noted the term "seeking your own pleasure" (RSV—"finding thine own pleasure," KJV) in Isaiah 58:13 does not, in the Hebrew, have reference to personal enjoyment. The word "pleasure" is *khephets* in Hebrew. In the Jewish Publication Society translation of 1917, it is rendered "thine own business." The New English Bible makes the meaning clearer than either the King James Version or the Revised Standard Version:

"If you cease to tread the Sabbath underfoot, and keep my holy day free from your own affairs, if you call the Sabbath a day of joy . . . if you honor it by *not plying your trade*, not *seeking your own interest* or attending to *your own affairs*…."

This translation shows the true intention of the words "your own pleasure." The Hebrew term rendered "pleasure" is often translated "desire" or "purpose" in other passages (e.g. 1 King 5:8–10; Eccles. 3:1, 17; etc.). The Jewish translation speaks of "pursuing their own business" and "thy wonted ways." The Hebrew *khephets* is not addressing the question of *pleasurable* activities that are illegal on the seventh day. If pleasure were not present, how could the day possibly be a delight?

This scripture—Isaiah 58:13—has been erroneously applied by some to such activities as television-viewing, swimming, listening to music, marital relations, and even reading the weekly comics in the newspaper. Of course, any of these activities *could* violate the spirit of the Sabbath day if they were to be *abused* or overdone. Of and by themselves, though, they are not wrong. What is wrong is any activity that interferes with or detracts from the joy, rest and spiritual intention of the day. If any activity works *against* the spirit of the Sabbath, it is wrong, no matter what it is.

The main concern of most scriptures pertaining to the Sabbath is that *one should not pursue his usual business or work activities on that day*. One should have more of God and less of himself in his thoughts on the Sabbath. It is a day to *honor God*, to remember His creation, and to *rest*. Obviously then, it should not be a day of violent physical activity of any kind—work or play. It is a day of restfulness. It is a time to unwind and draw close to God. One's own thoughts of business, moneymaking, buying and selling, or one's job should be minimized if not forgotten. The cares of the week are left behind. It is a day to "take it easy" and to worship God. This is the *spirit* of the day.

This background should help put things in perspective. Jesus provided additional insight into the intention of the weekly Sabbath when He said, "*it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath*" (Mt. 12:12). He was speaking of such things as healing or pulling a stranded animal out of a ditch, or similar activities. Jesus was expounding the *spirit* of the day in these examples. By the "ox in the ditch" example (Lk. 14:5), He showed that it is not that all physical activity is wrong on the Sabbath—but that the kind of physical activity which is involved in earning a living or in doing business is. Pulling an ox out of a ditch can involve considerable expenditure of physical effort, yet it is not wrong because it is "doing

good." It is a matter of capturing the spirit of the law and ordering one's priorities aright. If we can do good for a domestic animal, how much more for a human being who is of infinitely more value (Mt. 12:9–13)?

The sect of the Pharisees missed the point of the Sabbath law. They thought that virtually *any* physical effort, except for a very limited amount, was wrong. Christ showed what is important is not the effort, but the *kind* of effort and the *direction* of that effort. Doing good—*serving people* who are in dire need—is not wrong on the Sabbath day. Serving one's own business interests is wrong. What about doing one's own business on the Sabbath if that business is "doing good"—in the health services, for example? Obviously, emergencies and responsibility for human welfare follow Jesus' own examples regarding doing good on the Sabbath. Yet there can be a fine line between such responsibilities and the regular full-time work of the normal week. One who truly desires to keep God's Sabbath will not seek an excuse to regularly engage in work on the Sabbath, yet will be instantly ready to aid fellow human beings who are in need of help.

With these basic guidelines in mind, it should be evident the individual must evaluate each situation that confronts him as it arises. He or she must answer several basic questions: will this activity violate *the spirit and intent* of the Sabbath day? Can I do it in faith? If there is doubt in the person's mind, because the activity contemplated is questionable, it is probably best to avoid it (Rom. 14:23). If it would offend his conscience—or that of others in the Church—he should avoid the activity. Paul said, "if food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall" (1 Cor. 8:13).

These guidelines are what the Church provides to its members as the *basis* for their personal decision-making. It is not the duty of the ministry to spell out and rule on every last kind of activity in the human realm! It is in its spiritual significance. It is the individual's responsibility to interpret that teaching in the light of his or her own situation and to discipline him- or herself accordingly.

By way of clarification, the following examples may be instructive:

It is obviously out of step with the spirit of the Sabbath day to participate in violent physical sports activities. Can one "keep the Sabbath holy" while charging down a football field or a basketball court? In competitive sports, one must go all out to the point of exhaustion to win. The Sabbath is a day of *rest*.

The Sabbath would not be a day to dig up the garden, or plow or harvest in a major way. But there is nothing wrong with watering the lawn or pulling up a few carrots or breaking of stalks of celery for a fresh salad.

One should not do the entire week's shopping on a Saturday; one should plan ahead. But if the baby needs milk, and you are out of it, there is nothing wrong with picking up a quart or two. There is a principle here.

As a rule, Christians should avoid getting into situations where Sabbath observance becomes difficult. As we have always said, it is best to remain far from the edge of the cliff. Why trouble your conscience? This is especially true concerning business matters. Partnerships with non-Church members can be difficult in this respect. One has to remember that, for a Christian, there is a balance between the proper keeping of the Sabbath for himself and his Christian duty to treat his neighbor with the utmost respect and outgoing concern. Herein lies the ever-present danger of the two extremes: 1) a Christian can delude himself into not helping his family or his fellow man because of his self-righteous desire to "perfectly" keep the Sabbath holy; 2) the same Christian can delude himself just as convincingly into not keeping the Sabbath because he has persuaded himself that others "need" him to work.

There is no simple solution to this dilemma: no formula to apply, or panacea to discover. God designed our minds and His law so we would have to confront difficult and unique situations throughout our Christian lives. How we handle each of these situations shall determine the quality of character we are building; that is what building character is all about.

In all this, we should remember that Israel was a self-contained, controllable, theocratic community. In today's world, on the other hand, Christians cannot control the circumstances of their environments except to a very limited extent. We are sent into the world (Jn. 17:18). We must coexist with a world that, for the most part, does not obey God. Our situation is quite different from that of ancient Israel.

The Church therefore advises its members to use

vision and foresight in planning business ventures that could present problems in the future. They are encouraged to avoid awkward and difficult situations. Oftentimes we are presented with difficult choices. In the developing nations, for example, certain activities on the Sabbath are compulsory by law. Those failing to comply can be shot or imprisoned! If a man is to be imprisoned and taken from his family who rely upon him to support and provide for them, it is far better that he perform a public service on the Sabbath (e.g. garbage disposal) if the law requires it, than to allow this to happen. God places heavy emphasis in the New Testament on a man's responsibility to provide for his own family. He who fails to do so is considered to be "worse than an infidel" (1Tim. 5:8).

In certain parts of Europe, it is possible to lose custody of one's children if one does not send them to school on the Sabbath. If this were to happen, parents would have no control over their children whatsoever. Moreover, they would still end up going to school on the Sabbath. It is *better* to allow them to attend school that half-day than to lose them altogether! Of course, it is not ideal, but it is the best thing to do under the circumstances.

The Sabbath is a means of honoring and worshipping God. We can honor and worship Him in the privacy of our homes by having the time to draw closer to Him. This can be accomplished by rest, prayer, reflection (meditation) on His ways, and reading His handbook of life—the Bible.

We should also formally show honor and worship to God by assembling with His true Church on His Sabbath. The Sabbath is called a "holy convocation" (Lev. 23:3). The book of Hebrews states God's Church must not neglect "to meet together" (Heb. 10:25). J. B. Phillips translates this verse: "And let us not hold aloof from our church meetings."

The Sabbath demonstrates one's recognition of God as Creator, both past and future, and as Lord of our lives. If we do not set aside the Sabbath day—not just any day of the week, but the day specifically ordained, sanctified, and commanded by God and His Word—perhaps it is because of a disinclination or "inability" to serve Him and put Him first. One's respect for the Sabbath is one means (among many) of showing one's true attitude toward God and His rulership.

Keeping the Sabbath in its full spiritual intent is a means of developing and demonstrating godly love. It is also a solemn command from God, who wants only the best for His creation. Physically and mentally, the Sabbath renews the body to do more in six days than could be done in seven without such rest. Spiritually, it shows respect and love toward God. God's Sabbath is surely "for men" (Mk. 2:27).

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ANNUAL HOLY DAYS

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The annual holy days were ordained by God, kept by the ancient Israelites, and continued by the early New Testament Christians. These seven annual "appointed feasts" picture God's plan of salvation for mankind.

Leviticus 23; Zechariah 14:16; John 7:8–10; Acts 2:1; 12:3; 20:6, 16; 27:9; 1 Corinthians 5:8; 16:8

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The annual *holy days* are named the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day. These days occur on specific dates of the current Hebrew calendar, with the exception of Pentecost which is counted in a biblically prescribed manner, but always landing on a Sunday. Like the weekly Sabbath, each is reckoned from sunset to sunset.

The functions of these annual holy days are partly the same as those of the weekly Sabbath. The primary importance of the festivals is their function as spiritual symbols, outlining God's plan of salvation for the individual and the world. These days include

religious instruction and worship, which provide spiritual renewal on a regular basis.

The holy days serve as spiritual, psychological and social high points of the year. They allow people to get together in an atmosphere of leisure and enjoyment. In addition, these days provide opportunity to rest physically. Psychologically, the human need for change of pace and a time to forget the ordinary concerns of day-to-day life is met by these periodic festivals.

However, the central concern of these days is spiritual. Supplementing the weekly Sabbath services, there is still a need for intensive concentration on spiritual matters over a period of days without the distraction of the normal routine of making a living. The spring and autumn festival seasons supply this, especially the Feast of Tabernacles, which is customarily held only in a few central locations.

The holy days fulfill the spiritual objective of being holy convocations for the Church today. They also are "shadows of things to come" pointing to and outlining the substance of God's great plan of salvation for all mankind. This is briefly summarized as follows:

The *Passover* represents the sacrifice of Christ which pays for the sins of all who repent and accept Him in faith. It also represents partaking of eternal life through Jesus Christ (shown by the bread and wine which symbolize His body and blood). The *Feast of Unleavened Bread* is symbolic of the continual separation of sin from the spiritual sphere of one's life and the consistent practice of a new godly way of life, emulating Christ, who was unleavened—without sin— by eating unleavened bread every day during this time.

Pentecost pictures both the foundation of this New Testament Church and the sending of the Holy Spirit for the individual. The *Feast of Trumpets* symbolizes the spreading of the gospel to the world like the trumpet call of a watchman; it also shows the return of Jesus Christ to set up the Kingdom of God on earth. The *Day of Atonement*, a solemn day of fasting and self-searching, represents the time when sin shall be placed upon the head of its ultimate source, Satan the devil. The removal of the cause of evil allows God's Kingdom to hold unopposed rulership over mankind. The *Feast of Tabernacles* is symbolic of the millennial rule of God through Jesus Christ and His saints. It shall be followed by an opportunity for salvation for all who have lived and died and were not previously called to have a part in the first resurrection—this is the meaning behind the *Last Great Day*. The culmination shall be the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21), in which all creation shall be renewed in preparation for the humanly unfathomable eternity beyond with the Father "tabernacling" on Earth with His family of immortals.

DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

Apart from the Sabbath, there is no explicit mention of the annual festivals in Genesis. However, the Hebrew word translated "appointed time" (*mo'ed*), used elsewhere in the Old Testament to specifically refer to the annual festivals, occurs in Genesis 1:14 in reference to purposes for God's creation of the heavenly bodies.

Exodus 12 is the first clear biblical reference to the annual festival days. The institution of the Passover at the time of the Exodus is well known and need not be rehearsed in detail here.

Exodus 23:14–17, a part of the Old Covenant passage, describes "three times" or seasonal observances in a year within which the seven annual holy days fall. These "times" include the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Harvest (Pentecost) and the Feast of Ingathering (Feast of Tabernacles). Similarly, Exodus 34:18–24 and Deuteronomy 16:16 list the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) and the Feast of Tabernacles. Originally all of these festivals were built around the system of agronomy in the ancient Near East. By following this logical system, the holy days gain significance and their spiritual purpose can be more easily understood.

Several passages give a more complete and detailed description of the annual holy days. The most complete is Leviticus 23; others include Deuteronomy 16 and Numbers 28–29. The following information is taken primarily from these passages.

Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread: The Passover lamb was slaughtered on the 14th of Nisan. It was eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs on into the evening. That night the death angel passed, spared the Israelites who had put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts, and slaughtered the Egyptian firstborn. This began a period of seven

days of eating unleavened bread. The 15th and 21st days were holy days on which no work was to be done. The intervening days were not holy days, but no leaven was to be eaten or any leavened products to be in the houses. It was on the Sunday during this period that the first sheaf (*omer*)—of the new harvest—was offered as the Wave Sheaf offering. Only after this offering could the spring harvest begin.

Pentecost (Feast of Weeks): This festival took its name from the manner in which it was determined. Rather than being celebrated on a particular calendar day, it was counted seven weeks or fifty days from the Wave Sheaf Day—hence the term "Feast of Weeks" in the Old Testament and "Pentecost" (Greek "fiftieth") in the time of the New Testament. It marked the end of the spring harvest. The basic instructions for determining the date of Pentecost are clear in Leviticus 23:15–16, which reads as follows according to the Hebrew text: "You shall count beginning with the day after the Sabbath, the day on which you brought the wave sheaf (seven Sabbaths shall be completed), to the day after the seventh Sabbath; you shall count fifty days." In other words, one begins and ends counting with a Sunday, hence a Sunday is the day of Pentecost. This interpretation is confirmed by the practice of the conservative and priestly groups represented by the Sadducees, the Samaritans, and the Karaites.*

Feast of Trumpets: This festival, on the first day of the seventh month (Tishri), was celebrated by the blowing of trumpets—hence the popular name. The Old Testament significance of this day seems to have had its origins in the trumpet sound of alarm used to call people to a state of general warning or preparation for war (Ezek. 33). The spiritual significance will be discussed later. In later times, it marked the beginning of the civil year just as it does among Jews today. (However, it is not clear that this was the case in Old Testament times. A popular theory among Old Testament scholars has been that the new year began with this day in Old Testament times; but recent studies have called this into question and have advanced reasons for believing that in Old Testament times the new year began in the spring with Nisan 1.)

Day of Atonement: The 10th day of the 7th month had quite an elaborate ritual in Old Testament times and continued up until the destruction of the Temple. It was a commanded fast day in which nothing was eaten or drunk for 24 hours, from the evening of the 9th to the evening of the 10th. On the day itself, the ritual of the two goats was enacted as described in detail in Leviticus 16. Two goats were selected. By drawing lots, one was chosen to represent God and the other to represent "Azazel." In later literature "Azazel" was considered a name for the chief of the demons, i.e. another name for Satan (1 Enoch 9:6; 10:4). The high priest first sacrificed a bull for himself and entered into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat. Then, he slaughtered the goat "for the LORD" and sprinkled its blood on the mercy seat, as he had done the blood of the bull. In this way the high priest was the only person to ever go into the Holy of Holies, and then only on the Day of Atonement. At all other times, and to all other people, it was off limits. The goat for Azazel then had the sins of the people confessed over it by the high priest. After that it was taken away live into the wilderness and turned loose, symbolically removing all the transgressions of the people away from the camp. Thus, the Day of Atonement symbolized the reconciling of the Israelites to God.

Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day: This was a festival period beginning with the 15th day of the 7th month, a holy day, and continuing through the 22nd, another holy day. During this time the Israelites were to build temporary shelters or booths (Hebrew *sukkah*) comparable to that used by a

* Granted, other groups used either the first or last holy day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread as their reference for counting, rather than the weekly Sabbath. This interpretation evidently originated in the change of the meaning of the Hebrew word *shabbat*. This is the word occurring three times in Leviticus 23:15–16 (and translated "Sabbath" each time in the translation above). The original meaning of the word was the weekly Sabbath, but it was occasionally used for the annual Sabbaths, as well, though always clarified by the context. However, during the intertestamental period, the word came to mean "week."

Thus, the Pharisees took the word "Sabbath" in the sense of "annual Sabbath" and "week," so that they counted seven weeks" beginning with the first holy day. The Essenes, while using a solar calendar, and the Falashas interpreted the word as "week," counting seven weeks from the Sunday after the Passover week. These interpretations, although originating before the first century A.D., were evidently incorrect. The term "Sabbath" was not likely to be used of an annual Sabbath without clarification. Thus, the Pharisaic method was an unlikely interpretation. Further, to take the word "Sabbath" in the sense of "week," as the Pharisees, Essenes and Falashas all did, was anachronistic; the word did not have this meaning in Old Testament times.

watchman in a field or vineyard. This led to the designation "Feast of Tabernacles" or "Feast of Booths" (Hebrew *sukkot*). This festival corresponded to the end of the autumn harvest.

A distinction is made between the first seven days of the festival, the Feast of Tabernacles proper, and the last or eighth day. Some passages refer only to a feast of seven days (Deut. 16:15). Leviticus 13:33–36 shows that the last or eighth day is in fact a separate festival. That is, just as the Passover commences the Feast of Unleavened Bread but is a distinct celebration, and just as the Wave Sheaf Day is a distinct celebration even though falling within the Feast of Unleavened Bread, so is the Last Great Day the consummation of the Feast of Tabernacles though considered a festival in its own right.

Old Testament Examples and History

The rejoicing and the enjoyment of the bounties of the land were made possible and accentuated by the coincidence of festival season and harvest time. That is, all of the annual holy days fall at the beginning, during, or at the end of a harvest period. Furthermore, the Israelites were told to set aside a certain part of their harvest produce for use exclusively at the festivals. (This is discussed further under Tithing and Giving.)

The regulations for observing the festivals are contained primarily in the legal sections of the Pentateuch. In the historical and later books only passing reference is made to the annual holy days. Certain references in the historical sections strongly imply whole periods went by in which there was little or no celebration of the holy days. Following are some of the more important passages.

Joshua 5:10–11 describes the first Passover after Israel crossed the Jordan. Chapter 6, which tells of the destruction of Jericho, may envision the seven-day siege as the seven days of unleavened bread; but this is nowhere explicitly stated. Nothing is stated in the book of Judges—which describes a period of partial anarchy and feudal chaos—except for 21:19: "Behold, there is the yearly feast of the LORD at Shiloh." The exact feast is not named.

The first chapters of 1 Samuel show a functioning sacrificial center at Shiloh where the ark and the Tabernacle were located. None of the festivals are mentioned by name. However, the general description, plus the mention of Elkanah's coming up annually, suggests the annual festivals were being observed in some manner. The ark continued to be a religious symbol, but the actual extent of a fully functioning religious system is not clear. Only after David captured Jerusalem and transferred the ark was there an atmosphere which both allowed and encouraged the traditional observances. David proposed to build a temple but was prevented.

Under Solomon, with the construction of the Temple, a full temple service was instituted. This is the first explicit mention of festival observance outside the Pentateuch. First Kings 8:2 states: "And all the men of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month." It was at this Feast of Tabernacles that the ark and the holy vessels were brought up to the Temple (see also 2 Chron. 5–7).

The temple service was continued through Solomon's reign and for a time afterward (e.g. 2 Chron. 8:12–13). However, with the split of the kingdom under Rehoboam, the northern kingdom of Israel ceased to go to Jerusalem to worship. Instead, Jeroboam set up calves of gold in Dan and Bethel and ordained a festival in the eighth month (1 Kings 12:25–33). After this there is a period of approximately two centuries in which worship at the Jerusalem Temple by the northern tribes evidently fell into oblivion. At various points the books of Kings mention individual kings over the northern kingdom continued to follow "the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat" (e.g. 1 Kings 15:34; 16:26; 22:52; 2 Kings 3:3; 10:31).

The next mention of a major festival observance is under Hezekiah, shortly before the fall of the northern kingdom (2 Chron. 29–31). But evidently this revival was short-lived, undoubtedly because of the acts of his son, Manasseh. It was not until the time of Josiah that the Temple was repaired and the services begun again. At that time a copy of the law was found and its instructions followed. This shows the depths to which worship of God had degenerated (2 Kings 22–23). A Passover was observed according to the law "…no such Passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or during all the days of the kings of Israel or of the kings of Judah" (2 Kings 23:22).

It was almost a century before another festival observance is mentioned. With the return of the exiles from Babylon, worship services were set up again, the Feast of Tabernacles was kept in that first

year even before the foundations of the new Temple were laid (Ezra 3:1–6). Yet some three quarters of a century later, at the time of Ezra, we find the temple service evidently requiring some revival. Despite the new Temple, the law was still in need of promulgation. Exactly what happened in the meantime is not clear; it is clear the law was minimally observed. Even though the Feast of Tabernacles was observed with the first return of the exiles, it seems to have been forgotten until Ezra made it known again to the people in the time of Nehemiah (Neh. 8).

After the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, there are long periods, which we have very little information. Yet the Temple survived and the service continued to a greater or lesser extent. With the second century B.C. our information becomes much fuller. Despite the attempts at extirpation by Rome, the temple service continued basically unabated for two centuries before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.

It might be noted here that the new moons are often mentioned in association with festival celebrations in the Old Testament. During the lengthy centuries when the calendar was determined by observation of the new crescent, witnesses had to report to the proper authorities so the new month could officially be declared. The day of the new moon was, consequently, very important. Therefore, new moons were always given a certain special regard.

On the other hand, new moons are never designated holy days. They are not included in any of the lists of festivals. No special sanctity or mandated observances are ever attached to them. The only extraordinary regard accorded them was that certain special offerings were carried out on those days. But this did not in any way hallow them, since offerings were offered every secular day as well. They also lost their special function when the calendar became determined solely by calculation in the early centuries A. D.

Holy Days in the New Testament

Within scholarly circles, it is widely acknowledged that the early Church continued to observe the annual holy days of the Old Testament: "In the early Christian Church the propriety of celebrating the festivals together with the whole of the Jewish people was never questioned, so that it needed no special mention" (*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 628).

However, it is obvious the annual festivals took on a new significance in the apostolic Church and were transformed into celebrations. Jesus Himself played a great part in this by His teachings and example.

The Gospels show a number of examples of Jesus observing various festivals. It was so expected that He would be in Jerusalem for these occasions that people waited to see whether He would come when His life was in danger (Jn. 7:11; 11:55–57). In addition to His last Passover, He came to Jerusalem on at least one other Passover (Jn. 2:13), as well as spending one in the region of Galilee (Jn. 6:1–4). John 7 describes events during a particular Feast of Tabernacles. Unnamed feasts are mentioned in John 4:45 and 5:1. He also attended the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah), even though this was not one of the Old Testament Torah institutions.

By far the most important festival of Jesus' life was the one at which He was betrayed. On this occasion, He met with His disciples at the beginning of the 14th of Nisan. It is clear not only from the Gospel of John that He had the Last Supper a day earlier than the Jews had the Passover (Jn. 18:28), but this is also indicated by passing remarks in the Synoptic Gospels. (While it is recognized that there are still some unanswered questions in any attempt at harmonizing all four accounts, it is evident that Jesus took His Passover a day earlier than the Jews.)

In any case, Jesus at this time changed the symbols of the Passover for Christians and also went through the ceremony of washing the disciples' feet. Then He died as the Passover Lamb of God.

The apostolic Church commenced several weeks later on the day of Pentecost. Again, an Old Testament observance immediately took on deep new Christian significance for the Church, because the Holy Spirit was first sent on that day.

Various festivals are mentioned elsewhere, though generally only in passing. Pentecost is mentioned twice besides Acts 2 (Acts 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:8). The Day of Atonement is called by its common designation by function of the time, "the Fast" (cf. Acts 27:9). These all indicate an environment in which the holy days were known, accepted, and

observed.

One passage is basically undisputed as showing holy day observance in the early Church. This is 1 Corinthians 5:6–8:

"Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

As most commentators and scholars who have written on this verse point out, observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is presumed. Otherwise, the play on being physically versus spiritually unleavened, and the reference to "let us celebrate the festival" would have no meaning. Again, this passing reference shows a time when festival observance was taken for granted.

Of course, the most detailed discussion is devoted to the celebration of the Christian Passover. First Corinthians 11:17–34 gives detailed directions on how to take the "Lord's Supper" (*kuriakon deipnon*) or "communion." The memorial celebration was conducted "on the night when He was betrayed," that is, the evening at the beginning of the 14th (v. 23). The symbolic meaning will be discussed further below.

The scriptures often cited by Christian churches to refute the necessity of keeping God's holy days—Galatians 4:10 and Colossians 2:16—are discussed under Sabbath. Suffice it to say here that if it is assumed Paul was "doing away" with the holy days, the relative obscurity of the specific meaning of these scriptures and the general lack of importance of the whole issue is totally incongruous and inconsistent with the enormous importance of these holy days in the religious environment of the times. The fact that Paul stated the holy days "are [present tense] a shadow of what is to come" (Col. 2:17) in no way lessens the Christian's obligation to keep them. (The present tense reference to the holy days is interesting by itself, indicating *continued* Church observance.) Indeed, for the Christian, who can now see in these God-ordained feasts the profound spiritual substance of salvation through Jesus Christ, the imperative to keep the holy days is far greater now than ever.

Spiritual Meaning

The holy days serve as an outline or picture of God's salvation plan—both for the individual and for mankind in general. This understanding is based on a multitude of scriptures and ultimately is derived from the examples of Jesus and the New Testament writers who expound the meaning of some of the celebrations in unequivocal terms.

The holy days not only teach us God's plan of salvation, they point us directly to our Savior Jesus Christ. Christ is our Passover. It is by putting on Christ that we put out sin (Unleavened Bread). Christ was the first of the first-fruits, and it was through His resurrection that we can receive the Holy Spirit as Counselor, Comforter, or Advocate (Pentecost). We believe Christ is going to intervene in world affairs on the Day of Trumpets and become King of kings and Lord and lords. Those who have accepted Christ are now at one with Him through baptism and His Spirit—having their sins forgiven. Christ is coming to set up His government in the Millennium and rule this earth, and His people are now preparing the way for and are representatives of that Kingdom by following in Christ's footsteps (Feast of Tabernacles). Finally, Christ shall make salvation available to everyone in the last great step of His plan, which is the ultimate conclusion of His personal sacrifice as our Savior (Last Great Day).

The Church keeps God's annual holy days in their true spiritual intent as constant reminders of the plan of God. It stresses their spiritual meaning just as Paul did in 1 Corinthians 5 when he wrote, "Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Passover: The bread and wine that Jesus instituted at His last supper and that are taken yearly by the Church today are explained symbolically both by Jesus Himself and by the apostle Paul. The wine represents the shed blood of Jesus who gave Himself as an offering to pay for all the sins of mankind. That full and complete sacrifice makes it possible for one to have any and all sins forgiven upon repentance. The wine also represents the New Covenant made between God and the Christian sealed by the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:22).

The bread represents the body of Jesus which was torn and beaten for all of us, in Christ's ultimate sacrifice for mankind. Perhaps the fullest discussion

of its meaning is found in John 6, in which it is shown Jesus is the "bread of life." The eating of the bread and the drinking of the wine represent partaking of the eternal life which only God can give. The beaten body of Christ also represents the stripes He took on His back enabling us to claim the gift of divine healing for our physical infirmities (Is. 53:4–5; 1 Pet. 2:24).

Jesus Himself explains the purpose of the foot-washing ceremony as showing true humility and the proper sense of service (Jn. 13:12–17). No one can be greater than His Lord, who is Jesus Christ; yet Jesus was the greatest servant of all and gave more than anyone else for mankind. This spirit of Christian love and service is expressed symbolically by washing another person's feet and then allowing that person to reciprocate.

Thus, the Passover represents Christ's sacrifice for all— both the individual and the world—and pictures the initial step in salvation. Only through acceptance of this sacrifice can one repent and be forgiven. Repentance is the first step for our individual conversion.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread: Leaven is used to symbolize a number of things, both good and bad. In relation to this festival it is a negative symbol, representing sin (1 Cor. 5:6–8). The putting out of leaven from one's house pictures ridding one's life of sin as a continual process. It also represents the action of the new convert in attempting to leave the world (symbolized by ancient Egypt) and in removing sin from his life. Conversely, the positive act of eating *un*leavened bread represents our conscious desire to actively seek a sinless way of life in following God's laws by spiritually manifesting "Christ in us," which consuming unleavened bread symbolically portrays.

The crossing of the Red Sea is symbolic of baptism (1 Cor. 10:1–2). Ancient Israel crossed the Red Sea sometime during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (some commentators suggest on the last day). The new convert soon finds that it is not so easy to leave "Egypt" (the world), that "Pharaoh's army" (sin) comes pursuing him. But God provides help and leads him safely through baptism, driving back the power of temptation, sin, and the world through His Holy Spirit.

The night of Nisan 15, a "night to be much observed" for the people of Israel (Exodus 12:42), began the annual week-long celebration of Israel's liberation from bondage in Egypt (13:6–8; 23:15). On this night, many Church of God members come together in meeting halls, restaurants, or homes to celebrate their liberation from the bondage of sin. The event involves a special meal and, usually, a Scripture reading and brief explanation of the purpose of this celebratory occasion.

Pentecost: Pentecost is the anniversary of the founding of the New Testament Church. It initiates God's plan of salvation for the world. Just as Pentecost marked the spring or first harvest, so Pentecost symbolizes the first small harvest of individuals through God's Church. In the salvation of the individual, Pentecost represents his receiving of the Holy Spirit after baptism. This Holy Spirit enables him to do what he could not do before, just as the disciples were able to go forward in spreading the gospel in a way totally impossible before the Holy Spirit came. An example is Peter's boldness in proclaiming the gospel so soon after his clear cowardice when Jesus was betrayed. (A late Jewish tradition holds that ancient Israel received the law from God at Mount Sinai on Pentecost. This would make sense, since only through God's Holy Spirit can a person keep God's law in its true spiritual intent.)

Feast of Trumpets: Trumpets were instruments often used to sound the alarm for war. They were also the instruments of the watchman to arouse the sleeping populace if danger threatened. This festival represents the preaching of the gospel to the world by God's faithful watchmen who have the responsibility of arousing the people from their spiritual slumber (Ezek. 33:1–16). At this point, God has ceased to let mankind go his own way. The time has come to sound the alarm and attempt to save as many as we can—to save man from himself. Otherwise, man will succeed in self-destruction.

The Day of Trumpets also symbolizes the resurrection of all who died in Christ and the "change" of all who will be living in Christ. This stunning event—the achievement of eternal life for a great multitude through birth into the Family of God—will occur simultaneously with the return of Jesus Christ at the last trump. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorrupt-

ible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:52).

Jewish tradition adds some interesting parallels. For example, the Day of Trumpets (*Rosh Hashanah*) is said to picture the most important judgment time, when the Creator shall judge the inhabitants of the world. Furthermore, Tishri I was considered by some Jewish commentators to be the beginning of Creation—which fits nicely, making a complete parallelism, fulfilling the "Day of the Lord" —the time of the Creator's physical return to His creation as Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord and lords.

Day of Atonement: The Day of Atonement symbolizes both the reunion of God and man after Christ returns to earth, and the binding of Satan to render him inactive. The evils of human nature are the attitude of Satan the devil. As long as the source of evil remains active, evil will have a part in subverting the world. At this time, the sins of the world shall, correctly, be placed on their source, as symbolized by the Azazel goat which was sent away into the wilderness. Satan shall be chained and no longer allowed to deceive the world (Rev. 20:1–3). This is not to diminish our own role in sin, for the Day of Atonement also represents the reuniting of God and man through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of mankind, thus establishing at-one-ment between God and man.

Feast of Tabernacles: This festival metaphorically illustrates the Millennium—the 1,000 years of Christ's reign on earth. The true harvest of mankind can now take place. Without Satan—the original source of evil finally removed—all nations can now be brought to God. For 1,000 years, a Golden Age shall reign: happiness and peace shall be reality and worldwide salvation shall be possible. This harvest of people is far larger than the first as the larger fall harvest portrays in the agricultural cycle. The Millennium shall be the time when God sets His hand to save the world. It shall be a time of rebuilding the waste areas, and forging of a new modern society under God's laws.*

The Last Great Day: Despite a thousand years of peace and happiness, it must be remembered that untold millions have lived and died without ever having the knowledge to understand salvation. The Last Great Day represents the time when they shall be resurrected and given that chance—not a second chance but a first chance—a chance they will not have had before. Only then shall God's initial plan for mankind be at an end. Thus, this last great holy day of God pictures the greatest period of salvation for mankind—the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11–15).

The culmination of the plan of salvation is marked by the renewal of the whole creation in the new heaven and the new earth. Death and destruction are now no more; human history has ended. The Kingdom of God has become eternal and the Father comes to Earth to tabernacle with His immortal family (Rev. 21:1–3).

Observance in the Church of God

The Church observes these same holy days given by God in the Old Testament, and upheld and kept by the Church of God and the apostles in the New Testament.

The major distinguishing feature of the annual holy days is their spiritual function and significance, which are framed in actual events. They provide the opportunity to forget the mundane day-to-day cares of the world and provide time to concentrate on the things of God. In addition to private worship and devotion, church services are held just as on the weekly Sabbath. At these services, the spiritual significance of the particular festival or holy day is generally the theme of the sermons.

The need for periodic festival celebrations seems intrinsic to all human beings. It is doubtful whether there has been a human culture in recorded history without certain annual or periodic observances. This need is met in the Church today in the manner our Creator ordained, by continuing to maintain the annual festivals kept in the Old Testament and by the early Church. Like the weekly Sabbath, these days have necessary spiritual, psychological, and physical purposes.

The functions of the annual holy days are partly

* An interesting interpretation of the Feast of Tabernacles as symbolic of the millennial reign of Christ is found in the writings of the late third century Catholic commentator, Methodius. Although he evidently did not keep the festival himself, he perceived it—perhaps reflecting an earlier tradition—as picturing a time when the "earthy tabernacles" would be put off and Christians made immortal would celebrate the true feast (Symposium 9.1).

the same as those of the weekly Sabbath. They provide physical rest from the regular routine. Yet there are a number of differences on the purely physical plane of observance. The annual festival periods provide high points of the year as social occasions for which the refreshment of leisure and fellowship can be enjoyed.

Psychologically, the annual festivals usually allow a lengthier break from regular routines than does the weekly Sabbath day. They are something to look forward to. They provide the occasion for doing things as a family unit. While they differ somewhat from the traditional modern holiday or vacation, their psychological function is very similar, especially for those who do not have other vacation periods during the year.

One of the major differences of the annual festivals from the weekly Sabbath is that Church members are enjoined to follow the biblical injunction of Deuteronomy 14:22–26, and set aside up to one tenth (or tithe) of their income in a special fund for use in celebrating these days. (See Tithing and Giving.) This provides the opportunity for the enjoyment of extra-special food and drink. During the non-Sabbath days of a festival, suitable recreation is also encouraged, especially for the family unit. A special offering is taken on each of the annual Sabbaths in accord with Deuteronomy 16:16–17.

In addition to regular church services on each of the annual holy days, the following festivals have their own special observances.

The *Passover* is observed on the evening at the beginning of Nisan 14 in a very solemn ceremony, the most structured of any of the annual assemblies. The order is, first the foot washing service, then the taking of the bread, and finally the drinking of the wine. Before each part of the ceremony appropriate scriptures are read. A reading of selections from John 13–17 concludes the service. The next night, the evening at the end of the 14th and beginning of the 15th, is marked by a joyous celebration of small groups in individual homes, restaurants, or catered halls. This, of course, is the time of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, and is a parallel celebration of the Christian's emancipation from sin. The entire seven-day period is a time of eating only unleavened food products. All leaven is removed from the homes before sunset at the end of the 14th.

The *Day of Atonement* is kept by a complete fast (no food or drink) from sunset to sunset (Lev. 23:32). (Exceptions are of course made by the individuals themselves in cases of serious illness and the like.)

The *Feast of Tabernacles* is considered the highlight of the sacred year. Primarily for this festival, Church members save a budgeted second tithe. Since the Feast of Tabernacles is celebrated only in certain central locations, most members must travel a certain distance to attend, and spend the entire time away from home. While actual booths are no longer built, the same symbolism is maintained by the fact that Church members live in temporary dwellings (motels, hotels, condos, campsites, etc.) away from home. So, in order to spend the eight days away from home, and to meet the expenses for travel, food, and lodging, saving ahead is necessary (cf. Deut. 14:22–26).

Along with the weekly Sabbath, these festivals place worship and service of God at the forefront of the minds of Church members. Rather than embracing former heathen celebrations that have been syncretized with Christian observance or making up celebrations without any precedent, the Church sees the real human need of regular festive celebrations which can best be met by age-old, God-ordained observances clearly attested in the Bible itself. The Bible based holy days carry a symbolic teaching that looks forward as well as backward and places God and His plan squarely in the center—the focus of its range of vision.

Millennium

The Old Testament prophets looked forward to the rule of God's Kingdom on the earth (a time identified as the 1,000 year rule of Christ described in Revelation 20). Some of these prophets describe holy-day observance in several passages.

One of these passages is Ezekiel 40–48, in which an eschatological temple is pictured in detail. Along with the weekly Sabbath (described under Sabbath), the annual festivals are referred to in a general way in several verses (45:17; 46:9, 11). The Passover and Feast of unleavened Bread and the Feast of Tabernacles are named specifically (45:21–25) as being kept in the prophetic Kingdom of God. Zechariah 14:16–19 pictures a time when all nations shall come up to Jerusalem to worship at the Feast of Tabernacles. Those who refuse shall be punished by natural disaster until they repent and

worship as God desires. This demonstrates that the annual festivals of God are not restricted to Israel but rather are designed for the entirety of mankind.

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TITHING AND GIVING

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Tithing is an act of worship; it is a private matter between the individual and God. The Church does not "enforce" or "police" tithing, but simply teaches the responsibility to tithe. Each individual has the responsibility to "honor the LORD with his substance and with the firstfruits of all his increase." Tithing is a method by which the message of Jesus Christ is proclaimed to the world.

Malachi 3:8–10; Matthew 6:21; 23:23; 2 Corinthians 9:7

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The entire universe belongs to God—He designed it and created it; He sustains and maintains it. God, in fact, owns everything.

God created the material universe, including the earth and its resources, as a fit environment for an even greater creation. It was here that God placed man and began the creation of His own character in children eventually destined to be born into His own family. Thus, this earth—and its vast store of animal, vegetable, and mineral resources—is only a preliminary step in a much larger drama unfolding progressively before mankind. It is God's purpose that human beings should eventually attain an infinitely greater role in rulership over God's creation by inheriting not merely this world and its resources but even the entire universe (Heb. 2:6–8).

Every human being owes his entire existence to God—his very life and living. In designing man, God knew it would be in man's best interest to worship his Creator in the fullest, most logical manner. Prayer is an important vehicle for that worship. So is obedience to God's Law, which is His system for governing man's proper behavior and activities. Tithing is an integral part of that Law.

The biblical precepts of tithing and giving are essential steps in accomplishing God's ultimate objective for man. The tithe is established by scriptural command and example. Since it is a recognized scriptural principle that "he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much," the steadfast tithing of one's wealth, whether meager or abundant, serves to teach one a profound spiritual lesson. If a man can learn not only to share his substance for the benefit of others in a spirit of humility and generosity, but also to acknowledge that God is the source of all things, then that man shall be developing the very same spiritual qualities required to properly handle the far greater wealth he will inherit in God's Kingdom (Mt. 19:28–29; 1 Tim. 6:17–19).

It is with this perspective the Church of God views the subjects of tithing and giving of offerings. In seeking to more fully understand the mind of God in this respect, we look to the Bible as the expression of God's will.

Tithing was ordained by God as one of His ways of teaching man how to honor and worship Him. Tithing is one of the most important ways by which a godly person of deep conviction and dedication can express his acknowledgement of, and appreciation for, God's blessings in his physical life today. Man, through tithing, continuously acknowledges that God is the Creator and Owner of the Universe, and as such has a prior claim on the whole content and produce of our lives.

Tithing accomplishes two other important goals in the Christian's life. Through it we build godly character by developing a giving spirit. Simultaneously, we are using our resources to share with others both the message and the blessings of the Christian life. Tithing serves as a means of expressing one's love towards both God and his fellow man. The biblical injunction of cheerfully giving ten percent of one's own income is a physical procedure designed to teach profound spiritual prin-

ciples and lessons. It is, indeed, in mankind's best interests.

Since tithing is biblically enjoined upon all who are called to obey God, the Church of God strongly teaches the overall laws, principles, and basic administrative guidelines for tithing as revealed in the Old Testament instructions of God. But tithing, like prayer, is a very private and personal expression of an individual's relationship with his God. It reflects one's faith in God and one's appreciation for the blessings He has bestowed. Therefore, actual implementation of how one should calculate his tithes is left strictly up to the faith and understanding of that particular person. Tithing is a matter between a person and God.

The Church's work has always been, and shall always be, a work of faith—a work totally relying on God for support and sustenance, as well as for guidance and leadership. Nonetheless, the work of the Church in the electronic age of the 21st century requires considerable resources. Gone are the days when itinerant evangelists would walk from town to town preaching the gospel wherever they could find an audience. The media utilized today is the Internet, printing press, radio, television, and mass-audience campaigns.

Moreover, the Church recognizes its responsibility to help the poor, indigent, and needy in (and outside) the Church who are not always able to receive government help or assistance from some other source.

Thus, based on biblical precedents, the Church sees three basic financial needs for which the membership has a responsibility:

1) Support of the work of the Church—both in its efforts to present the gospel to the world, and in providing for the spiritual care and growth of its membership.

2) Attendance at the annual festivals.

3) Assistance to fellow Church members in temporary or permanent financial straits.

These needs are met by a three-part system of tithing on the part of Church members:

1) With some exceptions, all Church members contribute a tithe of their income for the support of the work of the Church. This contribution is generally supplemented by various voluntary offerings. This goes to carry out the first need indicated above.

2) Members are expected to set aside a tithe in a special fund to meet the expenses of the annual festivals. This money is saved by the individual and does not come to the Church except for a requested small amount to help meet the expenses of renting large convention sites, or in voluntary offerings given at the Feast being observed. While those members who can are encouraged to save the biblically stated ten percent of their income in this festival fund, it is recognized this is not always possible for all. Those whose tithe is more than sufficient are asked to provide help for those unable to meet their festival expenses. To be clear, the concept of Christian stewardship involves members being responsible for the handling of their finances and not negligent or irresponsible with their budgeting. Sometimes the ministry can have a role in identifying members with a legitimate need for financial assistance to attend the Feast days.

3) Members who are able have the responsibility—based upon biblical precedent—to contribute to an assistance fund to help indigent members (and nonmembers as well). By these means, each Christian expresses his worship of God and outgoing concern for his fellow man as he practices true Christianity and develops character.

DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

Old Testament

The practice of tithing long predates the time of the nation of Israel. In the book of Genesis, tithing is mentioned twice. In both instances, tithing is used as a means of honoring God, of showing one's profound appreciation for the blessings God has given. Abraham tithed to Melchizedek on the spoils which he had gained from his slaughter of the five invading kings (Gen. 14:17–20; Heb. 7:1–4). His grandson Jacob promised to give a tenth of all that he acquired to God. This was after his dream of the "heavenly ladder" at Bethel (Gen. 28).

A detailed tithing system was introduced with the

Levitical priesthood. The entire tribe of Levi was set aside to carry out the sacral functions with the family of Aaron functioning as a central priestly core. Numbers 18 recounts the basic method of financing the Levites who were responsible for all the priestly and temple services. Various types of offerings came to them, including the firstfruits, redemption price for the firstborn, firstlings, and portions of sacrifices. But the major means of sustenance was the tithe. All agricultural produce was to be tithed at the time of harvest and given to the tribe of Levi. The Levites in turn were to give a tenth of it to the priests. Leviticus 27:30–33 shows that livestock was to be tithed as well as vegetable produce.

Deuteronomy 14:22–27 describes another type of tithe. In this case it was not to go to the Levites but was saved by the individual to meet his expenses for celebrating the festivals at the central location. This tithe was also levied on plant produce but not on livestock. Instead the firstling* animals are mentioned as being eaten at the festival site. This particular tithe is not given a name; in later Judaism, it bore the name "second tithe."

Every third year (that is, the third and sixth years out of a seven year cycle) a tithe of plant produce was set aside for the poor. It is not clear from the Hebrew whether this was designed to be another use for the second tithe or whether it was a totally new tithe in addition to the second. One tradition of interpretation in later Judaism indeed envisioned two separate tithes from Deuteronomy 14, making three in all when the tithe to the Levites is counted. However, later sources, in discussing the question, see only two uses of the same tithe. That is, it was saved to meet festival expenses in the first, second, fourth and fifth years of a sabbatical cycle, whereas in the third and sixth years it was given to the poor. (In the seventh year the land rested and no tithes were paid. Presumably, the produce of four years was sufficient to meet the festival expenses for the full seven years.) In any event there are three distinct uses for tithes in the Bible: supporting the work of God, attending the festivals of God, and caring for the poor.

Tithing is mentioned in other passages in the Old Testament. Several texts that describe the revival of temple services after they had fallen into decay naturally mention the priestly tithe, since the temple ritual could be maintained only where the priests were sustained by tithes and offerings (Neh. 10:37–38; 12:44; 13:12; 2 Chron. 31:5–6, 12).

In addition, two prophetic passages mention tithing. Amos 4:4 sarcastically calls on the people to bring their tithes and sacrifices, because these would obviously be of little value in the state of moral degradation they were in. Malachi 3:6–12 is delivered in a different vein: it equates failing to tithe with robbery of God. Curses result from failing to bring in the full complement of tithes and offerings, whereas faithful tithing produces bountiful blessings.

"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing" (Mal. 3:8–10).

Many Old Testament scriptures emphasize a responsibility to the poor. In addition to the poor tithe discussed above, provision was made for them in other regulations having to do with gleaning, leaving the corners unreaped and not returning to pick up the forgotten sheaf (Lev. 19:9–10; Deut. 24:19–21). If a poor man had given his coat as a pledge for a debt, he was to be allowed to have it during the night to keep himself warm (Deut. 24:10–13); the poor hired hand was to be paid at the end of the day because he had no money.

One of the major provisions of the sabbatical and jubilee years was the release of debts (Lev. 25:2–17; Deut. 15:1–11). The Israelites were also forbidden to refuse a loan if that refusal was based on the fact that the year of release was near. Furthermore, they were not allowed to charge interest on loans to needy persons (Lev. 25:35–36).

Oppression of the poor was considered a prover-

* A question arises about firstlings. The firstling was a firstborn male; if the firstborn was a female, there was no firstling offered to God from that particular animal. According to Exodus 13:11–15 and Numbers 18:15–18, the firstlings were to be sacrificed and given to the priests. One solution which harmonizes the passages understands that the priests did not receive the entire firstling but only those parts which they received from other offerings as well, i.e. the breast and right thigh. The individual bringing the animal could then use the rest of the meat for his own festival enjoyment.

bial sign of depravity and godlessness (e.g. Job 20:19; 31:19; Prov. 14:31; 19:17; 22:22; 28:3). It was the duty of any person of means to help the less fortunate. It was the duty of kings and rulers to give aid and protection to the widows, the orphans and the helpless (Deut. 10:18; 27:19; Is. 1:17). One's responsibility in this regard was continuous. There was no reason to think that strict payment of the poor tithe or other legal demands removed any need for an ongoing, active concern.

New Testament

Whereas the Old Testament provides a definitive system for giving and financial responsibility toward one's God and fellowman, the New Testament concentrates on the spirit and attitude behind giving. Christian giving is discussed a great deal in the New Testament. The proper, godly use of money is an important subject dealt with by Jesus Christ and the apostles. This use has two aspects: The first concerns the responsibility of a Christian to help the poor. Poverty was evidently a major problem in the early Church, as it was in Palestine as a whole. Acts 4:32–37 describes a period after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit when the Church continued together in Jerusalem living on voluntarily donated property and funds. These donations were not compulsory, so when Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property they were not compelled to donate the funds. As a result, when they did, but only turned over part of the amount while claiming to be giving it all, they indicted themselves. Their lie for the sake of self-aggrandizement met with quick retribution (Acts 5:1–11).

During a time of famine in Judea the churches in the area of Antioch took up a collection to provide relief. This indicated those in Palestine were generally harder hit than those further north (Acts 11:27–30). Even churches as far away as Asia Minor and Corinth were encouraged to assist (1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8:1–4; 9:1–5). This is only one of a number of examples.

A second aspect of Christian giving is support of the work of the ministry. The apostle Paul was willing to work with his own hands to earn his living on occasion. However, this was only for the sake of expediency, because he did not want to offend those sensitive to such things. First Corinthians 9 explains this in detail. In this passage, Paul is very strong in his comments. He does not mince words; he does not apologize. He emphasizes he has an absolute *right* to be supported by the churches in his evangelistic duties. He cites or refers to several Old Testament laws to support his right in this area, including examples concerning the threshing ox, which was not to be muzzled, and the support of the priests in the Temple. Those who devoted their time to preaching the gospel should receive their living from this work. Those who already benefited from this preaching—those who had already been converted through his efforts—were ones who should make possible the continuation of his work.

Paul also cites a precedent from Jesus Himself. "In the same way, the Lord commanded those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (verse 14). This has reference to the time when Jesus sent out groups of disciples preaching in Palestine. They were to preach only where they were provided with hospitality (Mt. 10:5–15; Lk. 10:1– 12). Thus, Paul states that Jesus Himself had commanded support for the work of the ministry by the recipients and beneficiaries of that work. Paul himself had not taken advantage of this right in the case of the Corinthians because of their spiritual weakness to this point (verse 12), yet he gladly received help from other churches (2 Cor. 11:8; Phil. 4:14–16).

Many scriptures discuss one's attitude toward money. It was on the occasion of asking for famine relief that Paul wrote:

"But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you" (2 Cor. 9:6–8).

Similarly, Jesus stated, "give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (Luke 6:38). Obviously then, generous giving of one's financial resources to do the work of God is taught in the New Testament.

Money is considered potentially for either good or evil. It can be used for good, as some of the scriptures imply. It can also be a source of oppression,

greed, egotism, and an obstacle to the Kingdom of God. The "rich man" is proverbial. He was generally expected to be arrogant, selfish, and despotic (e.g. Mt. 19:24; Mk. 10:24; Jas. 2:1–6; 5:1–6). The desire for money is the immediate source of most evils and is easily capable of leading even the faithful Christian astray (1 Tim. 6:10).

Thus, a great deal of stress is laid on the right attitude towards money. On one hand, it is right and even necessary to acquire money honestly in order to provide for oneself and one's family (2 Thess. 3:10–12; 1 Tim. 5:8). It is a means of assisting the less fortunate and expanding the spread of the gospel. On the other hand, it can be the cause of all sorts of wickedness and a major stumbling block to proper Christian living.

Jesus made reference to the meticulous tithing of the Pharisees (Mt. 23:23; Lk. 11:42). In one of His parables a Pharisee is made to introduce careful tithing as one of the signs of his self-righteousness (Lk. 18:12). In each case Jesus is condemning the emphasis on judging righteousness by external rituals rather than by the internal and true righteousness of the heart. To have the one without the other is pure hypocrisy. On the other hand, care in these outward matters is not condemned but rather encouraged, so long as the "weightier matters of the law"—the "justice and mercy and faithfulness" that serve as the spiritual underpinning of those outward matters—are not omitted.

Consequently, then, though it was not His main point, Jesus instructed His disciples that people who want to follow God should tithe when He stated "these ought ye to have done" in reference to tithing (Mt. 23:23).

Another direct New Testament reference to tithing is to be found in Hebrews 7. Here tithing is used in an argument to show the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood compared to the Levitical priesthood. Even though the Levites received tithes, they had in effect paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham because Abraham—who as their ancestor figuratively had them in his generative organs, as it were—had tithed to Melchizedek. Thus, even though Christ was from the tribe of Judah, which did not have the priesthood in Israel, He obtained the Melchizedek priesthood, a superior and perpetual priesthood, through offering Himself as a sinless sacrifice for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2).

Tithing as a specific subject is not discussed in the New Testament. The question is, Why? The explanation obviously lies in the historical environment. Tithing never became an issue in the culture of the early New Testament church; it was simply taken for granted—it was culturally understood to be one's religious obligation.

The Temple and its related service were still functioning until sometime after the beginning of the war with Rome in 66 A.D. Faithful Jews of the general Palestinian area would tithe to it. Since no discussion to the contrary is contained in the New Testament, Christians in Palestine would have simply continued to tithe to the Levites. Indeed, Matthew 23:23 confirms from the mouth of Jesus Christ Himself, since it is safe to assume Christians in those first few decades would have followed what Jesus Himself had stated so recently.

However, it was not considered by Judaism at this time that tithing was required for those living outside the borders of Israel in the same way as it was for Jews in the Holy Land that had direct access to the Temple. Therefore, it was probably in the diaspora that it first became customary to tithe to the Church rather than to the Levitical priesthood. The destruction and abandonment of the Temple and sacrificial system must have produced a change in Palestine as well.

Unfortunately, our sources outside the New Testament for early Church history is rather meagre. We are not told how the Palestinian Church faced the crisis of the Temple's destruction or the exact system of financing the "work of the ministry" throughout the Roman Empire. The change of circumstances evidently required a "new application" of Old Testament laws.

Recognizing the importance of the existence of the Temple during New Testament times is extremely relevant for understanding why tithing specifically was not discussed as an issue. By the time Jerusalem and the Temple fell in 70 A.D., Paul had already written all of his epistles to the Churches. In them tithing had not been an issue. It would have been a diametric contradiction of Jesus' direct words that one "ought" to tithe to the Temple if the apostles in Jerusalem had decided Christians should stop paying tithes to the Temple and start tithing to the Church instead. It would also have been a severe affront to the priests of God (whom Jesus Himself had supported), and would have

resulted in great additional accusations and persecutions against the nascent Church. Had such a radical decision been made, had the Jewish Christians stopped tithing to the priests and started tithing to the apostles, we would surely have some record of it. But there is only silence. As a result, the whole question of tithing as a general Church obligation could not possibly have arisen until sometime after the Temple was destroyed.

During the New Testament period, Christians in Palestine tithed to the Temple and freely gave generous offerings to the Church. Some people teach that God's Church cannot (or should not) teach tithing today based upon the New Testament's silence on tithing. As we have already shown, the "argument from silence" is more likely to show that tithing continued to be practised (as promoted by Jesus). Presumably such a significant change ("the abolishing of tithing") would have been written about and debated rather than accepted silently.

But when the Temple was no longer in existence, when the Levitical priesthood was no longer functioning, a new situation arose. Clearly, the responsibility of the Church to seek God's will in applying the laws of God to changing situations became apparent.

In this context, it is worth considering Paul's discussion of tithing in Hebrews 7. Jesus Christ, though not a Levite, had a more fundamental (and ancient) right to receive tithes, as "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" to whom Abraham (the ancestor of Levi) paid tithes. Therefore, it is entirely logical for the ministers of Jesus Christ to apply the statements regarding tithing throughout the Old Testament, from the example of Abraham to the powerful injunction of Malachi, in teaching the Church membership they should continue to worship God through the same God-ordained system of tithing that God has always used, and which Jesus Himself supported during His earthly ministry. But now, rather than the Levitical priesthood, who is no longer carrying out the work of God, Jesus Christ has empowered His ministry to accept the tithes of the Church (the people) in order to continue the work of God in this generation.

There are three "purposes of intent" behind the Old Testament system:

1) The Levitical tithe was a means of maintaining religious worship and instruction. The theocratic government envisioned for Israel was, of course, replaced by a monarchy. Yet the original purpose for the priesthood and Levites was the fulfilment of many governmental and educational functions of the country, as well as supplying its religious needs. In other words, in the theocracy of Israel, the Levitical tithe was used to do God's work.

2) The festival tithe made it possible to attend worship services at the central altar during the annual festival seasons. This was necessary for the maintenance of religious unity as well as being necessary for individual worship.

3) The poor tithe was a major way of helping the needy, even though other forms of aid were provided to supplement it.

The Church of God sees similar purposes continuing today. Tithing, as established by God, is the most equitable, honest, and consistent method of establishing the necessary income for the operation of the Church. Everyone shares this supportive responsibility equally. Thus, the freewill giving of tithes and offerings—the biblically revealed system—is the God-given responsibility to all the members of His Church.

It should be recognized that the Church becomes an object of disrespect when it receives only the dregs of incomes from its members. God should always have first place, not the last, in a Christian's mind when it comes to the proper use of His financial resources; God should be at the top of the list, not an afterthought, in the allocation of one's income.

The Church of God reconfirms and reemphasizes its adherence to the basic principle of tithing as established and exemplified in God's Word. The Church teaches the giving of tithes because it is the law of God. Consequently, withholding one's tithes, which violates that law, is a sin.

Tithing is the biblical method by which God finances His Work. Not only do members of the Church see examples of tithing and giving and the admonition regarding them in the Old Testament, they also have seen and experienced the blessings that come from faithful tithing and giving of generous offerings.

Many otherwise nonreligious people have attributed their financial success to their own freewill

giving and philanthropic activities. They follow the principle of "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Conversely, history and modem society are a witness to the evils of selfishness and thanklessness toward God. The fiscal ruin of governments and nations around the world is, at least in part, testimony to the results of financial management without regard for God's laws and principles.

Calculating Tithes and Offerings

Tithing is an act of worship; it is a private matter between the individual and God. The Church does not "enforce" or "police" tithing, but simply teaches the responsibility to tithe. Each individual has the responsibility to honor the Lord with his substance and with the firstfruits of all his produce (Prov. 3:9). God has determined that the minimum standard whereby one honors Him is a tithe of one's income. However, what is to be considered income is not necessarily the gross amount taken in. In ancient Israel one tithed his "increase" or produce because there were no tangible expenses. This is not true in modern society. A continual tithing of one's investment would erode the money-producing base. Therefore, it is recognized what is tithed on is what comes in over and above the monetary investment.

It is considered the responsibility of each individual to determine what his "increase" is. A businessman would naturally deduct the cost of doing business before computing his tithe. If one invested an amount of money, which had already been tithed, he would not tithe the entire investment each year, only the actual profits. These examples illustrate that only the actual "increase" is to be tithed. To reiterate, each person should conscientiously determine for himself what his increase is as an act of worship and of obedience to God.

Some individuals wonder whether one should tithe before or after government taxes. Here are some general principles to consider.

First of all, it is not the tithe that has become a burden, but skyrocketing tax rates. The "tithe" is always a tenth, and never a burden. But taxation rates vary widely and are subject to constant adjustments. A fundamental fact generally overlooked is that in ancient Israel each individual head of household was responsible for making his own decisions, before his God, as to what constituted "increase." Nowhere in the entire Bible are specific details or regulations given. God's law provided each head of household with an area of land on which he did not have to pay property tax—much less rent or purchase price (Num. 27:11; 32:10–5, 33–42; Josh. 13:8ff., n.b. v. 14). This was the acme of financial security.

Furthermore, when God gave instructions about tithing cattle, He did not require the first animal that came down the chute—even though He could have: He asked for the tenth. If no tenth animal came through or passed under the rod, God did not take anything. He simply did not claim the first tenth, only a tenth (Lev. 27:32–33). The conclusion is that the Israelites did tithe on the bulk of their income. God allowed offerings to take care of that. We follow the same practice today. The Church does not generate a whole legal code governing the interpretation of "increase."

In Israel, under Saul, ten percent was exacted from the people for human government in addition to the tithe which was part of the tithing system God instituted when He established the nation as His own. Saul imposed many burdens besides the ten percent tax (1 Sam 8:10–18). The imposition of taxes in Saul's reign has an important bearing on the question of tithing before or after taxes today. Did Samuel make a ruling that Saul's tax was now deductible from one's increase prior to determining God's tithe? No such ruling is anywhere recorded in Scripture. The Church today has no biblical precedent for deciding that all taxes withheld from salaries are deductible prior to figuring the tithe. On the other hand, the governments of this world seldom limit themselves to a ten percent tax structure. Many are collecting twenty-five percent, thirty percent, forty percent or more in income taxes—oftentimes without allowing any deductions for donations to charitable or religious organizations. In effect, this suggests governments can exercise the right to a prior claim—prior even, to that of God's—to one's earned income. This becomes obvious when certain countries have legislated eighty to ninety percent tax rates for individuals in the upper income bracket. For individuals in this category to pay tithes on their gross income requires over one hundred percent of their income, a self-evident logical absurdity.

Obviously, whenever any government allows its tax rate to become prohibitive, it is proper for the

individual whose tax burdens are significant to seek relief from that tax burden by modifying his increase or tithable base. The laws of certain countries—the United States is the best example—permit the taxpayer to adjust his tax base downward by the amount of his charitable contributions. This mitigates the effect of the tax—especially those in higher tax brackets—and allows a person to more easily continue to tithe on his gross income. In any case, the individual, not the Church, must make whatever decision is appropriate. Whether in a general situation or on any specific question, the individual himself is responsible before his God and he alone must answer to God for his stewardship. This is crucial.

Attitude is the key factor. The Church's doctrine on tithing must not be used by members as if it were a legalistically worded personal income tax form, hopefully providing various "loopholes" to lessen tax burdens. No one shall ever enter God's Kingdom with a miserly, selfish, grasping attitude of "get" instead of the loving, sharing, helping attitude of "give." The individual must know, in his deepest conscience before God, that he is living *in faith* before God and is staying on the *generous* side of his personally calculated tithing obligations.

It is the Church's and the ministry's responsibility to teach the general principle and law of biblical tithing. With every nation having its own tax laws, and constantly changing its laws, there is no possible way for the Church to legislate a definitive and equitable decision applicable to everyone in the matter of tithing before or after taxes. The same principle holds true for any other potential deduction used to determine one's real "increase" or tithable base. For example, some may subjectively determine insurance policies like medical/health, home, life, and car insurance are similar to third tithe assistance; however, others may not. But this goes to illustrate that individuals—not a body of legislators—are responsible for making those decisions.

Before coming to a decision regarding whether to tithe before or after taxes, an individual needs to consider several things: his own financial capacity, tax rate, the deductibility or non-deductibility of charitable donations, and the benefits received from taxes. These factors vary from country to country. For example, many countries have free education, free medical care, child allowances, and many other systems of financial returns on the tax dollar. How one figures his tithable base and what deductions he makes, are both very personal, private matters between the individual and his God. Any questions of conscience should be more than resolved with the giving of generous offerings when one is able to give. God is calling us to be co-workers in His work today and preparing sons in His Family tomorrow. Our financial responsibilities toward Him are a significant aspect of our stewardship—they are not part of a game—so attitude toward tithing is tantamount to our relationship with God. God knows our minds and hearts, and whatever we do or think is obvious to Him.

Other factors may influence one's decisions in determining the precise nature of our tithing responsibilities. For example, in situations where a converted husband has an adamantly antagonistic wife opposed to tithing, the man may consider she's entitled to half the income. This means the man pays tithes and offerings only on half of his actual income. Further, a wife whose antagonistic husband prevents her from tithing at all should consider herself free of any obligation because of his non-compliance.

God's Church uses the tithes of its members and interested co-workers to pay for the spreading of the gospel to the world, which is the Church's commission (Mt. 24:14; 28:19–20). These tithes also serve to support the ministry whose primary concern is to care for the local congregations. These two broad concerns cover a multitude of specific activities on the part of the Church. The Medina Church of God International features some full-time salaried ministers in leadership roles. However, in most church areas, the local pastors are not salaried.

Scripture shows that in addition to our tithes there is an opportunity for us to give offerings. God does not expect us to give money that we don't have. But, it shows God our hearts are in His work when we prepare an offering (for the annual festivals, for example).

In ancient Israel other tithes and offerings were also required (firstlings, firstfruits, redemption of

the firstborn, etc.). In addition, the Israelites were commanded not to appear empty-handed at the annual festivals; they were expected to bring offerings, each according to God's blessings (Deut. 16:16–17). These were offerings of animals on the altar. The material offering today is monetary, and is contributed to help the Church do its work rather than being burnt on the altar. The amount is voluntary, to be determined by each person on the basis of what he can afford and how he has been blessed by God. It is not the policy of the Church to take up offerings at regular Church services. Normally, each individual sends in his tithe and offerings privately. The only offerings taken up in services are on the holy days in accordance with the biblical command.

Festival Fund

Attendance at the annual festivals is considered mandatory for Church members except under unusual circumstances. Most holy day services are conducted in the local church areas and do not require extensive travel or time away from home. However, the Feast of Tabernacles is conducted at a few central locations and generally requires some travel as well as necessitating families and individual members being away from home for the entire eight days. Consequently, one's participation requires saving and planning ahead.

Based on the precedent of the Old Testament festival tithe, the Church teaches its membership to set aside an additional tithe for festival expenses (Deut. 12:5–6, 11, 17; 14:22–25; cf. Num 18:21–24, which is tithe for Levites only). Since the calculation of the festival tithe in the Old Testament was slightly different than for the Levitical tithe (omitting cattle but including firstlings, which were usually fewer than ten percent of a flock or herd), the exact percentage of one's income saved for the festivals may be somewhat variable. The letter of the law states a tithe is ten percent, but to avoid undue hardship in a society with significant taxes and costs of living, the church teaches that the spirit of the law is to save funds for observing God's festivals. Those who can save a full tithe are blessed and may be able to assist others who are less fortunate.

The precise administration of the festival tithe, in both its saving and its spending, is the sole responsibility of each individual. Those who have more than enough should make their excess available to those less fortunate and are unable to afford to attend the Feast. This can be done individually or by way of a festival fund in the local church.

The money each member saves in his own festival fund is, of course, his to use—within biblical parameters—for his own enjoyment of the festivals (Deut. 14:23–27). He may wish to take part or all of his holy day offerings from it, but any given to the Church is done so on a voluntary basis. The festival fund is not money for the Church, but money for the individual: to enable him to improve his worship of God, to learn to be a more responsible and mature member of the body of Christ, to enjoy the physical pleasures God has made available, and to help others rejoice as well. The Feast days are a highlight when some funds are used to provide gifts or whatever the family members may desire.

Assistance to the Needy

The biblical system of setting aside a tenth of one's income in the third and sixth years in a cycle of seven was a part of Israel's social-assistance system (Deut. 14:29; 26:12). The requirements set forth in the social-assistance system are met in today's social welfare systems. Government programs, however, do not eliminate one's obligations regarding charitable giving and assisting one's own family members when needs arise. Those greatly blessed should remember the less fortunate, both in their local churches and in the community at large. A local church fund specifically for providing assistance to the needy would be an appropriate application of this biblical principle.

The Law of Giving

Service to God consists of many things. A multitude of people will voice the desire to serve God, whether or not they really intend to seek out the means of doing so. Perhaps no other area is more sensitive in this regard than the financial one. But, as the book of James states, Christian love consists of more than kindly words or sweet platitudes. One can, of course, serve through encouragement, counsel, and prayer. But the work of the Church cannot go on in this moderm world without the necessary finances. Diligence in this area is often the test of one's real desire to serve God, to discover whether

one is willing to put one's full faith in His Laws and His Ways.

God is the greatest giver. He is the one that gives life and makes everything possible and enjoyable by His wonderful creation. God sets the example of giving by supplying what could never be repaid, and giving it to those that could never return the favor. Giving is at the heart of Christian love (Acts 20:35). We all receive; we show our appreciation by offering and contributing what we can to God and to our fellow man. God, in His infinite love, gave us His Son, setting the ultimate example of generosity. The biblical precept of giving tithes and offerings provides man with the opportunity to emulate this facet of God's character in a material as well as a spiritual way.

By establishing a minimum standard of ten percent, God teaches us that we can give more to Him than is "required"—and makes us inwardly richer in the process. Many people have liberally given above and beyond what would be "required" in order to do God's Work more effectively, and assist the needy in God's Church more fully. As a direct result, these generous Christians have experienced great rewards, both physical and spiritual blessings from God.

Clearly, tithing must be represented as being very personal between the individual and his God. It must never become a case of some thinking they are more "righteous" than others because their tithable base is larger and their donations are more. The offerings of everyone should be sufficiently above and beyond what is "required" (depending on individual circumstances, of course) that any doubts about having tithed fully and properly before God are removed.

Everyone should be careful in giving specific advice in matters of tithing to others. How one determines his increase is a personal matter between that person and God.

A most important point to remember: tithing is simply like prayer, it demonstrates the very essence of one's own personal dedication to God, to our Savior, Jesus Christ, and to the very Work of which Christ is the living Head. We cannot enter into God's Kingdom by deception, either in our private prayer lives or in our private tithing lives. We must beware of the "leaven" of the doctrines of either extreme: of the Pharisees, who tithed with rigorous, minute, painstaking, and self-righteous effort; or, conversely, of those who are careless with their income, think selfishly, and do not have a true spirit of giving. Christ commands us to "Give, and it shall be given unto you" (Luke. 6:38). Giving is *commanded*. Nevertheless, God allows us to decide *whether* we will obey.

Never should any person attempt to "check up" on somebody else concerning faithfulness in tithing. We all should recognize if a person is being unfaithful in tithing, he would in all probability and as a natural consequence, be slackening in other equally personal aspects of his private Christian life. The *attitude* and intent of the heart is the *whole* thing—they count most of all.

Those who hold, or seek to hold, offices of spiritual responsibility in the Church should be judged by a higher standard. The position of trust they hold before the brethren presupposes they have been found fully faithful in the area of tithing and generous giving. Those who teach others what to do are required to first set the proper example in their own lives (Rom. 2:21–29).

Far more important than a church member's wisdom regarding the manner in which he determines his increase is his *attitude* toward it. A truly converted Christian *is full of the spirit of giving*—and is *not* filled with greed, covetousness, selfishness, or resentment for having to give to God's work. God looks on the heart, not in the pocketbook. It is where Christ's ministry must also look—on the heart. And indeed, this is what the Church stresses. The Pharisees tithed with diligent exactness, but it took a widow with two mites to illustrate generosity of heart—she gave her all.

The Bible is replete with financial admonitions; for example, in 2 Corinthians 9:5 Paul states: "Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren." Second Corinthians 9:6–9 goes on to fully exemplify God's attitude.

"Remember: sparse sowing, sparse reaping; sow bountifully, and you will reap bountifully. Each person should give as he decided for himself; there should be no reluctance, no sense of compulsion; God loves a cheerful giver. And it is in God's power to provide you richly with every good gift; thus you will have ample means in yourselves to meet each and every situation, with enough and to spare for every good cause. Scripture says of such a man: 'He has lavished his gifts on the needy, his benevolence

stands fast for ever'" (NEB).

Tithing is a God-ordained means of giving. It supports the Church, enabling it to become God's instrument in performing His Work of giving that most precious thing, knowledge of the way to salvation and eternal life. Tithing is a natural and living law of God, which is rewarded in many ways, even though reward is not the object of that giving. Many faithful tithe-paying Christians have learned that one cannot outgive God. The opportunity to tithe is considered a privilege. Those who have dedicated their lives to God can testify there is no greater blessing than that which comes from the outgoing actions of helping others. Tithing is an expression of honor, love, and obedience to God and His laws, and of outgoing concern toward both the brethren in the Church and the unconverted people of the world.

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BIBLICAL DIETARY LAWS

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Biblical dietary laws, including the prohibitions of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, are among the many health laws God gave to Israel. Jesus, the apostles, and the early New Testament church observed them too, and they remain in effect today. Scripture indicates that laws pertaining to "clean" and "unclean" animals were recognized and observed from earliest times.

Genesis 7:2–3; 8:20; Leviticus 3:17; 11; Deuteronomy 14:3–21; Matthew 5:17–19; Acts 10:9–15, 28; Isaiah 66:17

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Creator God is our Maker. If anyone should know how the human mind and body operates, certainly He knows, since He designed and created it. He did not leave us in ignorance about our bodies and how we are to maintain them. The Bible gives us information needed to maintain, understand, and fuel this marvelous and intricate biological system we call the human body. Human beings, however, having human nature and being what they are, often opt to throw away God's instruction, to reinvent the rules of good health. Most of the problems in the world today can be traced back to man's refusal to consider God's instruction.

The Psalmist writes, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14). One could argue that following God's dietary laws is not a matter of our salvation, but who wants to take the chance? Our obedience to them *does* demonstrate our faith and trust in His Word. God looks upon our attitude in response to His laws. Anyone can give lip service, but not everyone exhibits his convictions in God's Word by actually doing what He says. Jesus said with extra emphasis, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished. (Mt. 5:17–18). (Clearly heaven and earth have *not* disappeared—and so the laws of God have *not* disappeared). As the apostle James stated, "You believe that there is one God; you do well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But will you know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (Jas. 2:19–20). And James further emphasized, "You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only…for as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jas. 2:24–26). God would not tell us to do something if it were not in our best interest; and the development of faith through the exercising of it validates its authenticity. That is very important to Him.

Just what is meant by clean and unclean?

Many millennia ago, God revealed His instructions regarding which kinds of animal flesh mankind should or should not eat. You will find an

adequate list in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. These fundamental laws were revealed to show to man the kinds of animal flesh that are compatible with the human digestive system. Without question, Noah was aware of the distinction between clean and unclean animals (Gen. 7:1–5). However, these laws were violated by most of the world's population; therefore, God reestablished these laws with His nation Israel (Lev. 11:1–2). Some will argue these clean and unclean laws were only for the nation Israel, but obviously the nation one is from does not change the makeup of the meat and whether or not it's good for the human body. The point is, it applies to everyone who is human, not just Israel. This fundamental law is not a part of God's great spiritual law, summed up in the Ten Commandments. And it is not normally a part of the ceremonial, ritualistic, or sacrificial laws later fulfilled at the crucifixion of Christ (Heb. 9–11). The law of clean and unclean meats is a health law and is therefore for all humanity.

The animals whose flesh is properly digested and assimilated by the human body were so made in the original creation; and there was never any change made in the structure of the human body at the time of the Flood, or at the time of Jesus' crucifixion, or at any other time. Scripture nowhere states or suggests that God made drastic changes in the makeup of animal flesh, resulting in meats unfit for food becoming suitable for supplying the needs of the human body. The unclean animals before the Flood remain unclean today—nothing has changed.

Before the Flood, Noah brought into the ark of the clean animals to be eaten for food, by sevens; but of the unclean, of which he was not, by twos, only enough for the preservation of those animals (Gen. 7:2). The inference seems to be that the additional clean animals were for food and sacrifice once Noah and his family were back on dry ground. Prior to the Flood, vegetables seem to have been the main constituent of diet. After the Flood, God gave Noah not merely the green herb (vegetables), as the major part of his diet, but of every type of living creature—clean animals, clean fish, and clean fowl (Gen. 9:3; Lev. 11). This verse does not say that every living, breathing creature is clean and fit to eat, but that "as the green herb have I given you all things"—that is, both plants and animals could now be used as food. God did not give poisonous herbs as food. He gave man the healthful herbs of the earth. Similarly, He gave the flesh of "clean" animals, not the "unclean," as food for humankind.

Even if mankind desired to determine what flesh was good or bad at the time, he was unable. That is why God reveals, in His Word, which meats are clean for us. Since the Flood, every moving, clean, healthful, non-poisonous type of animal life is good for food, in the same manner as God gave the healthful, non-poisonous herbs. Therefore, the instruction received in Leviticus 11 is not some ritualistic regulation for the Mosaic period only.

It should be understood by mankind that God is the Creator of all, and the author of all law. He gave mankind a dominion mandate: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). This involves the fundamental responsibility for research, development, education, and all other lawful activities of mankind for the purpose of improving the quality of his health, life, and environment. This dominion mandate gives humans stewardship under the Creator to "subdue the earth." Certainly, if man has this authority from God, you would think after nearly six thousand years he should know what food is good for consumption. Yet most don't even follow the simplest dietary food laws discovered by the professionals in the fields of medicine and science. Many simply insist on having their own way, eating whatever tastes good, in violation of God's food laws, and possibly shortening their life by these poor choices.

When God said, "Every moving thing that lives shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things" (Gen. 9:3), He did not mean that we should eat the flesh of unclean animals. Assuredly, we understand God did not intend for us to eat poisonous toadstools, poison oak, or poison ivy. Since we know enough not to eat poisonous green herbs, why not apply the same logic to unsafe and unfit ("unclean") meats? God states the only flesh He permits us to eat (among land animals) comes from animals that *divide the hoof and chew the cud* (Lev. 11:2–3). Animals such as the antelope, buffalo, cow, deer, gazelle, giraffe, ox, and sheep are clean animals.

His instructions are easy to understand concerning clean and unclean meats. Notice concerning the hog (swine). "And the swine [pig], though *he divide the hoof yet chews not the cud* it is unclean to you" (Lev. 11:7). There is always purpose and order in everything God does or creates. Why, then, the

"hog"? The hog was created as a scavenger. He was made to help clean the earth of refuse and filth. In order to survive on this diet, God equipped the hog with elimination tubes or glands just above the hoofs on each foreleg. Through these openings the hog eliminates a pus-like substance, a fluid of waste and poison. This causes the hog to exude such a malodorous stench. God created these animals to roam the land and forests, but man has penned them up and forced them to wallow in their own filth and excrement.

Out of all the animals that God pronounced unfit for human consumption, the hog (swine) is shown to be the most despicable and loathsome (Lev. 11; Deut. 14). God pronounced it an abomination to eat its flesh (Isa. 65:4). God speaks in no uncertain terms; He is coming in anger and fury, rebuking with flames those who defy His clear instructions and warnings. The world continues to disobey through ignorance and willful disobedience, suffering degeneration and physical depravity as a result—and without excuse! "For by fire and by His sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many. They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one tree in the midst, eating swine's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be consumed together, says the LORD" (Isa. 66:16–17).

Wherever we find swine mentioned in the Bible, it depicts a low, or the lowest, state to which any person can fall. The prodigal son, after squandering all his wealth, ended up feeding husks to swine, and even eating the husks himself. To eat the food pigs had touched was degrading beyond belief—he had truly sunk to the depths (Lk. 15:15). We are strongly advised by Jesus not to cast pearls (God's truth) before swine (Mt. 7:6). In the book of Proverbs, God compares a woman who does not practice discretion to the snout of a swine containing a jewel of gold (Prov. 11:22). The apostle Peter, speaking about individuals that had learned about Christ and salvation and had been greatly influenced by the truth, but then turned and rejected that truth and returned to sin, said such individuals were like a dog or sow. "But it happened unto them according to the true proverb, 'The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire'" (2 Pet. 2:22).

Because of what Jesus said in the book of Mark, many people believe Jesus abrogated the distinction between clean and unclean, "making all meats clean." In the New Testament, Jesus never said one word about all unclean meats being made clean. In Mark 7:1–13, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and calls them hypocrites because they were more concerned about ceremonially washings than they were about the important matters such as honoring parents (vv. 10–12). They were more concerned about the small amount of dirt they might eat because they did not wash their hands, but would transgress the law of God. Notice again, there is not one mention of clean or unclean meats. Jesus continues to scold them because they lay aside God's commandments, teaching instead the commandments of men (vv. 6–9).

Finally, in verse 19, we see the verse people assume gives them license to eat any kind of meat they want. But notice the explanation Jesus gives His disciples. "Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him" (Mk. 7:18). Why is this true? "Because it does not enter his heart, but his stomach, and is eliminated, *thus* purifying all foods?" (Mk. 7:19). This does not say all meats are clean! Jesus is speaking of a normal bodily function that expels all foods as well as the small amount of dirt you might get on your food if you eat with unwashed hands or pots and pans. Jesus went on to enumerate all the things that defile the man (Mk. 7:20–23). Dirt does not defile a man; it is the evil thoughts of the heart and the resultant actions that defile the man. As we point out later, Peter clearly does not believe Jesus made all meats "clean" (Acts 10:14).

Because of advanced farm feeding methods and refrigeration, many believe the flesh of the hog to be safe for human consumption. However, a hog is still a swine. Nothing can change that. Swine are scavengers and their flesh is susceptible to a greater number of diseases than any other domestic animal, with most of their ills transmissible to man. Some of the diseases passed from swine to man are *trichinosis, tapeworm, swine erysipelas, swine influenza, roundworm, undulant fever, food poisoning, hog cholera, boils, and a host of others*. The animals pronounced unfit for human consumption by God can, under normal conditions, become infected with the trichinosis parasite. Herbivorous domestic animals such as cattle, sheep, and goats do not become infected with the parasite since they are not scavengers and do not eat meat.

God's instruction in the Bible is not to eat the fat or the blood either (Lev. 3:17; 7:23; Deut. 12:16). Other scriptures speak against eating animals that are found dead, or killed by other animals (Lev. 22:8). Modern understanding by science and nutritionists agree there are "health reasons" for caution when eating blood, fat, or animals that may have died from unknown causes such as disease. Interestingly, Scripture allows Israelites to give or sell meat to foreigners from animals that died from unknown causes (Deut. 14:21).

In seeking to understand the intent of these laws, some have concluded that these are "health laws," while others see these as rules related to the "sacrificial system" and the holiness of Israel before God. Those who hold the latter view reason that since Christ (Heb. 9–11) is the fulfillment of the various sacrifices, we can now eat fat and blood (which were parts of the sacrifice reserved for God). Most within the Church of God International (and related groups) consider the dietary laws as scriptural *health* principles (supported by science and Scripture), concluding that we are not to eat fat, blood, or animals found dead of unknown causes.

Our God is our Lawgiver, Creator, and Savior, and He is also our Master Dietitian. His instructions are given in love and concern for our wellbeing. In the book of Deuteronomy, God enumerates the blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (Deut. 28). He has set before us blessings and cursings and commands us to choose rightly. "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deut. 30:19). Through building godly character, by means of choosing God's way and overcoming every obstacle standing between God and ourselves, we can become sons and daughters of God, blessed with long life and good health!

After reading about Peter's vision (Acts 10) of an enormous sheet or sailcloth tied at the corners being let down to the earth containing all kinds of quadrupeds, wild animals, reptiles of the earth, and birds of the air, many interpret this to mean that God was telling Peter the dietary laws were abolished (Acts 10: 11–12). There came a voice to him saying, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat" (Acts 10:13). Peter was with Jesus throughout His ministry. Certainly if Jesus had taught the Old Testament dietary laws were abolished and meats previously termed "unclean" were now cleansed, it could hardly have gone unnoticed. This would have been a highly controversial (and very significant) change. Peter could hardly have missed the significance of it. Peter's reply to the Lord was, "Not so, Lord; for l have never eaten anything that is common or unclean" (Acts 10:14). Then the voice from heaven replied, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common (Acts 10:15).

These events occurred three times, and the vessel was received up again into heaven (Acts 10:10–16). Notice, in verse 17, that Peter doubted what this vision meant. Whatever response we expected from Peter it seems unlikely he would have "doubted himself" about the vision's meaning. Yet, Peter's initial doubt makes no sense if Jesus plainly taught the cleansing of all meats. The context of Acts 10 shouts that Peter's vision had to do with people, not meat. "You know how it is unlawful for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God has showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (Acts 10:28).

It is obvious that unclean meats were still unclean, but *people* who had been considered "unclean" were no longer considered unclean. God was showing Peter and the pious Jews of that day, who treated Gentiles (people or other nations) as unworthy of Godly acceptance, that "God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that fears Him and works righteousness is accepted with Him" (Acts 10:34–35). While Peter yet spoke these words an amazing event unfolded: "The Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 10:44–45).

Among the Jews of the first century, uncircumcised Gentiles (people of other nations), were considered unclean, and it was considered unlawful according to the Jewish tradition, not the Law of Moses, for a Jew to enter the house of a Gentile and eat with him. But the intentions of Jesus Christ was to have all people, regardless of nationality, in the Church He was building, provided they would repent of their sins and accept Him as their Savior. The purpose of the vision, then, was to make this intention of Christ's quite clear to Peter. As time passed, many Gentiles accepted Christ as their

Savior and entered the Church. They also embraced the Sabbath, the annual festivals, and the dietary laws, along with the Ten Commandments.

Cornelius was a Gentile, and he accepted all of God's laws. "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that fears God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always" (Acts 10:1–2). It is quite clear Cornelius knew the Hebrew's God, and kept God's Old Testament laws, and had a good reputation among the Jews. Scholars tell us during the first century there were three classes of people. There were the pagans, both the idol worshipers and irreligious. There were the proselytes of Judaism who submitted to the rite of circumcision and became Jews; and lastly, there were those who were known as "God fearers" who, though uncircumcised, worshiped the true God, believed the Scriptures, and even went to the synagogues on the Sabbath day. Cornelius was a "God fearer." He is described as "one that feared God" (Acts 10:2, 22). Most of the Gentile converts to Christianity at this time were "God fearers." It is most unlikely these people would abandon any of God's laws they had so devoutly embraced.

Peter's vision was not about Jesus Christ changing His Father's clean-unclean laws, but instead was all about accepting all people into God's Church and not calling them common or unclean. There are two different words in the Greek, often carelessly translated "common" or "unclean." Peter used both of these words when he said, "Not so Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common [*koinos*] or unclean [*akarhartos*]" (Acts 10:14). *Koinos* means polluted through external misuse. *Akathartos* means unclean and impure by nature. A hog (swine) is unclean (*akatharros*) by its very nature and not suitable for human consumption.

A cow is clean, suitable for human consumption, but can become common (*koinos*) by (l) improper killing or bleeding of the meat (strangulation), (2) disease, or (3) being offered to idols. Paul used the Greek word for "common" (*koinos*) in Romans 14:14. He did not use the Greek word for "unclean" (*akathartos*). Clearly, Paul knew that none of the clean foods God had sanctified were by nature polluted, but vegetarians who were weak in the faith, weak in understanding God's Word, thought meats should not be eaten. To such a vegetarian—"to him," not to others—that meat seemed polluted. His conscience defiled the meat for him; he would become upset were he to eat meat. But that does not make the meat polluted.

Therefore, the context of Romans 14 is whether to be a meat eater or a vegetarian. Another reason for not eating meat is some people thought it had been made common by becoming polluted or defiled, possibly because it had been offered to an idol. If you recently repented from idol worship, it would bother your conscience to eat meat offered to an idol, because you think it is defiled. Those who believed this were to follow their conscience and not eat such meat because if you believe a thing to be sinful, you should not do it, even if it really is not sinful. "And he that doubts is damned if he eat, because he eats not of faith: for whatever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). The only circumstance in which clean meats are ever common or polluted is when the clean animals have died of themselves or the blood has not been properly drained. That is why the apostles and elders, when gathered at Jerusalem, forbade the use of meat from strangled animals and meat with blood in it (Acts 15:20). Such animal flesh was called "common" because it could be given to strangers or aliens in Old Testament times if those people wanted to eat it. They were the common, or polluted, people of other nations, not the chosen and clean people, Israel (Deut. 14:21).

In New Testament times, clean meat offered to idols was prohibited if it was polluted by strangulation or the blood remained in it. Otherwise, it was permitted to be eaten if it did not offend anyone. Paul devoted the entire eighth and tenth chapters of 1 Corinthians to instructions on not raising the question of meats offered to idols. "But if any man say unto you, 'This is offered in sacrifice unto idols,' eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake" (1 Cor. 10:28). In other words, if clean meats offered to idols were not polluted, you could eat them unless it offended someone. Under those circumstances, the meat became common, not to you, but to others who raised the question about idols. Notice: "Conscience, I say not thine own, but of the other" (v. 29). That is why Paul said, "But to him that esteemeth anything to be common, to him it is common" (Rom. 14:14).

One other scripture used to try to eliminate bibli-

cal dietary laws is 1Timothy 4:4, which says, "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving." This snippet of scripture is interesting, but even as a snippet one has to question what it is saying because if "everything is good and not to be rejected," what about a salad consisting of poison ivy? Or the poison sacks of venomous snakes? This makes no sense until you look at the context of the verse (and even the whole sentence, since the snippet chops off the end of the sentence).

The whole passage says: "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim. 4:1–5).

Clearly this passage is dealing with asceticism, not food laws, and the sentence is clearly qualified by saying that *everything that is "consecrated" (set apart) by God's Word* is good for food.

Is it really important for a follower of Christ to keep the clean-unclean laws found in the Old Testament? In Leviticus 1:1, God spoke to Moses out of the Tabernacle and instructed him to teach the children of Israel the law of offerings (see Leviticus chapters 1–7, noting that all these sacrifices were burnt; none of it was eaten; it was a sweet smelling savor unto the Lord). Only clean animals were acceptable to God, such as the bullock, sheep or goat, turtledove, and oxen. No unclean animals were ever offered to God by His priesthood. In Leviticus 11, God gives instructions as to what is clean and unclean. He goes on to say, "For I am the LORD your God that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am Holy" (Lev. 11:45). God expected the Israelites to eat as He instructed them and not eat unclean animals. Failing to obey would make one unholy!

God's Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, and the worship of God in that Temple ceased. We might ask the question, where is God's Temple today? "What? know you not that your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19). Those who have accepted Christ Jesus as Savior are duty-bound not to follow the dictates of their fleshly desires, which leads to the detriment of their bodies—for they are like slaves bought at a slave auction with the blood of Christ (1 Cor. 6:20). Paul also warned the Corinthians not to defile the Temple of God. "If any man defile the Temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the Temple of God is Holy, which Temple you are" (1 Cor. 3:16).

As Christians, it is easy for some to dismiss the Old Testament as being without relevancy in their lives, but Paul did not think so. He reminded the early church that, just as Israel was baptized unto Moses, they (and Christians today), are united in Christ by baptism (1 Cor. 10:1–4). Paul went on to say that those things that happened to the Israelites were examples for us today (1 Cor. 10:11). Again, Paul, speaking to the Romans, admonished them to lay aside their own daily desires and follow Christ, offering themselves as living sacrifices. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). Dare we pollute our bodies with unclean meat, or for that matter, anything that's unclean, since our bodies are a living sacrifice to God?

If we defile our physical bodies, which are considered the Temple of God, by eating unclean meat, we have sinned. "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 Jn. 3:4). So, our attitude about clean and unclean meats is very important. By being cavalier and not careful of what we eat, we allow sin to come into the innermost part of our mind (the Holy of Holies), thereby defiling that most holy place where God's Spirit resides. If this is not realized and repented of, God cannot continue to dwell there. If we neglect eating clean meats, eventually we could become lax, and neglect to eat the proper spiritual meats. "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: you cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and the table of devils" (1 Cor. 10:21). Real Christians, followers of Christ Jesus, only place on their tables the food God Himself permitted on His altar or table, the clean animals listed in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy l4. When viewed in the light of all the Scriptures, clean and unclean

meats become a very important.

Which Animals are Clean and Which are Unclean?

Mammals

Characteristics: Bear their young (not eggs), suckle their young, breathe through lungs, hair on skin, constant body temperature, four-chambered heart.

Clean

The Bible says animals that chew the cud and part the hoof are permitted for food. These animals are herbivores, have incisors in upper jaws, stomach with four compartments, and hollow or solid horns. **Examples**: Cow, sheep, goat, buffalo, deer, gazelle, antelope, ox, giraffe

Unclean

1. Parts the hoof but does not chew the cud. Walks on hooves, possess canine and incisor teeth.

Examples: pig, bear, hippo

2. Chews the end but does not part the hoof; small hooves like nails; walks on cushion-like pads; tusk-like canines on both jaws and incisor teeth on upper jaws; stomach has only three compartments.

Examples: camel, llama

3. Solid-hoofed herbivorous; single-stomach; incisor teeth on both upper and lower jaws.

Examples: horse, donkey, mule, zebra

4. Carnivores. Six incisors and two sharp canine teeth on both jaws; four or five toes with claws on each foot and walk either on their toes or their paws.

Examples: lion, leopard, dog, wolf, jackal, fox, hyena, bear

5. Other mammals; neither chews cud nor parts hoof.

Examples: ape, bat (even though found with birds in Lev. 11:19), elephant, hare, mouse, rat, whale

Fish

"Whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat" (Lev. 11:39). It is clarified even more in verse 10: "And all that have not fins and scales in the seas...they shall be an abomination unto you." An often-asked question is, What fish have both fins and scales? It is worth remembering many fish have very small insignificant scales or small patches of scales near the head and tail fin. In either case, such fish are clean and fit for food.

Clean

A complete list of clean fish would be too long to enumerate. The following is a short list of the most important clean fish having both scales and fins. They are albacore, anchovy, barracuda, bass, black fish, bowfin, buffalo carp, characin, cod, croaker, darter, flounder, gaby, grayling, haddock, halibut, herring, jack, mackerel, minnow, mooneye, mullet, needlefish, perch, pike, salmon, sardine, shad, silver side, smelt, snapper, sole, sucker, sunfish, surffish, tarpons, trout, tuna, weakfish, and Whitefish. For further research try your public library.

Unclean

A number of commonly known unclean fish that are scaleless and not fit for food are catfish, eels, paddlefish, sculpins, sticklebacks, sturgeons, and swordfish. These fish do not have true scales. Other forms of sea life unfit for human consumption are abalone, clams, crabs, lobsters, oysters, scallops, shrimp, and whale.

Fowl

Leviticus 11:13–19 and Deuteronomy 14:11–20 reveal specific varieties of birds unfit for human consumption. Strange as it may seem, no clean birds are listed. Only about two-dozen unclean birds are listed out of thousands found the world over. These unclean birds illustrate the characteristics of all unclean birds. They fall into types of which is unclean "after its kind." The important question now is, How do these unclean birds differ from those known to be clean or fit for human consumption? Please note: the characteristics of clean fowl are, determined by the dove and the pigeon (Lk. 2:24; Lev. 1:14–17), which were anciently

used for sacrifice. The quail is clean since God provided it as food for Israel (Num. 11:31–32), and the sparrow is clean since it was sold for food and Christ recognized this use (Lk. 12:6). By comparing the differences between these clean birds and those listed as unclean, we can arrive at the following characteristics of clean birds.

Clean

1. They must not be birds of prey.
2. They catch food thrown to them in the air, but they bring to the ground and divide with their bills. (Unclean birds devour it in the air, or press it with one foot to the ground and tear it with their bills.)
3. They must have an elongated middle front toe and a hind toe.
4. They must spread their toes so that three front toes are on one side of a perch and the hind toe on the other side.
5. They must have craws or crops.
6. They must have a gizzard with a double lining which can easily be separated. Examples: duck, goose, hen, house sparrow, partridge, peacock, pheasant, pigeon, quail

Unclean

Birds of prey. Falcon-like birds are carnivores, have hooked beaks, sharp talons bent like hooks.

Examples: eagle, kite, hawk, buzzard

Vulture-like birds feed on carrion, bare neck (usually), thick bill which is solid, talons blunt and only slightly inclined.

Examples: Griffin vulture, black vulture, Egyptian vulture, bearded vulture

2. Night birds of prey; large head and eyes, four toes (two pointing forward and two backward).

Examples: owl

3. Water and marsh fowls, all are unclean with exception of goose and duck.

4. Other birds.

Examples: crow, swift, ostrich. Some unclean birds such as the roadrunners, woodpeckers, and the parrot family (which divide their toes so that two are on either side of a perch), aquatic and wading birds and gulls that have no crops or craws, no double lining of gizzards, and often no hind toe or elongated middle front toe, are not listed specifically in the Bible.

Amphibians

Characteristics: Amphibians are vertebrates born in water, living in water, on land, or both. During the larva or tadpole stage, they breathe with gills, and the adult stage either with lungs or gills. Their body temperatures will change according to the medium (water, land, etc.) in which they live.

Clean

There are no clean amphibians.

Unclean

Examples: salamander, newt, toad, frog

Reptiles

Characteristics: Creeping and crawling things that have short legs or none at all, so that they move close to the ground or drag along it; live mostly on dry land; have lungs; majority lay eggs with soft shell in which the white and the yolk are mixed; cold blooded (temperature adjusts to the environment); skin covered with scales.

Clean

There are no clean reptiles.

Unclean

Reptiles are included in the general prohibition. "And every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth shall be an abomination; it shall not be eaten. Whatsoever goes upon the belly, and whatsoever goes upon all four, or whatsoever hath more feet among all creeping things that creep upon the earth, them ye shall not eat; for they are an abomination" (Lev. 11:41–42). The crocodile would be included in this prohibition by "whatsoever has no fins or scales in the water" (Lev. 11:12). All species of snake are prohibited.

Examples: black snake, viper, cobra

Invertebrates

Characteristics: Largest number of species in the animal kingdom. They have no bony skeleton; their

skin is either bare or covered with a shell. They reproduce by a simple division of the body, by laying eggs, or by bringing forth their offspring alive. The smallest creatures of this group are the protozoa, whose existence was not known until the invention of the microscope.

Clean

Among the millions of species of insects, there are only a few permitted for human consumption. "Yet these may ye eat of every flying creeping thing that goes upon all four which have legs above their feet, to leap withal upon the earth; Even these of them ye may eat; the locust after his kind, and the bald locust alter his kind, and the beetle after his kind, and the grasshopper after his kind" (Lev. 11:21–22).

Unclean

Most invertebrates are an abomination and prohibited. Those that live in water are under the prohibition either of fish that lack fins and scales or of any living thing that is in the waters. "And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers, of all that move in the waters, and of any living thing which is in the waters, they shall be an abomination unto you" (Lev. 11:10). Those that live on land are forbidden also. "Whatsoever goes upon the belly, and whatsoever goes upon all four, or whatsoever hath more feet among all creeping things that creep upon the earth, them ye shall not eat; for they are an abomination" (Lev. 11:42).

Examples: snail, oyster, squid, jellyfish, sponges, protozoa.

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THE HEBREW CALENDAR

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The CGI Ministries uses the Hebrew calendar to establish God's holy days. The book, *The Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar*, by Arthur Spier, lists all the holy days of the Jewish calendar from 1899 to 2100 CE, and thoroughly explains all the rules the Church has consistently used for many years. Scripture does not provide detailed instructions about the calendar, but history shows Jewish religious authorities devised meth-ods and calculations to keep it attached with the seasons. Since Jesus did not raise any calendar objections during His ministry, it is understood He accepted the current Hebrew calendar for identifying God's holy days.

Genesis 1:14; Exodus 12:2; Romans 3:1–2; Numbers 11:16-24; Deuteronomy 17:8–13; Matthew 23:1–3; Psalm 81:3; Numbers 9:2–3

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Almost all Sabbath-observing churches use the "Hebrew calendar" to determine when we observe the Lord's Supper and God's holy days. It has generally been assumed—though not a Jewish belief—the calendar itself is "holy," that it was directly inspired by God and handed down to Moses, that the Jewish authorities are charged with its maintenance. It is clearly important that the calendar be properly respected and preserved. However, it is hoped, that whatever form of calendar is used, all brethren may worship together and serve our God in harmony and in peace, following their informed conscience.

Since man's creation, it has been imperative that the passage of time be measured—e.g., for agricultural, business, government, historical, and social use. But it was also important for religious purposes. At creation God appointed heavenly bodies to

"serve as signs to mark seasons, days, and years" (Gen. 1:14). The "seasons" are *moed* (Hebrew)—"appointed meetings," used later in Scripture for God's holy day appointments with His people.

There is no biblical or historical evidence God revealed how to measure time. It was for man to discover. God gave man "dominion over the work of His hands" (Ps. 8:6)! The principle is established by delegating to Adam the responsibility to observe and name the lower creation—so it also is with the measurement of time. Seth, a son of Adam, was noted in folklore for his skill in astronomy and science. He lived 912 years—long enough to observe the regular movements of the constellations and planets and to work out the pattern for the seasons! (The precession of the equinox is just one degree in seventy-two years!) By observing over time the movements of the sun, moon, and constellations, man has concocted measures of time suitable for his needs (Ps. 19:1, Prov. 25:2).

Indications are that until the Great Flood in Noah's time there was a simple regular annual pattern of twelve months, each thirty days long. This calendar can be derived from the biblical account of the Flood period (Gen. 7:11, 8:3–4). This cycle, however, was no longer the case post-Flood, and calendar adjustments had to be made to accommodate major changes. Our year, for example, is now 365¼ days long. History records confusion, with different nations after the dispersion at Babel developing their own calendar to account for the extra days, planetary attraction, and earth's newly acquired "wobble" of around three degrees. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* (article: "Calendar") details the immense variety of calendars.

Perhaps surprisingly, there is no recorded controversy in the Scriptures—Old or New Testament—regarding the calendar. The sole firm calendar indicator is the instruction that the year commences in Abib—the month of "green ears," "the earing month" (of barley), which is in early springtime. Writes C.F. Keil (*Manual of Biblical Archaeology*, vol.1, p. 461): "...the Law contained no regulation on the matter [of figuring the beginning of the year]."

In Egypt, however, the year at one stage was reckoned to begin with the annual overflowing of the Nile, occurring in what we would call June. Israel most likely, had been forced to adapt it during their two centuries of serfdom. Josephus recounts the patriarch Abraham, when in Egypt, taught the Egyptian astronomers accurate astronomy, the science that underpins the calendar (*Antiquities:* Bk. 1:8:2). He learned this when he resided in Babylon. He also notes that Moses—"educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22)—used this same calendar when leading the tribes of Israel out of Egypt around 1490 BC (Bk. 1:3:3).

The "Jewish calendar," in other words, was widely used throughout the Middle East. "The Babylonian calendar, imposed by the kings of the first dynasty [from 2000 B.C.; Abraham born c. 2166] of Babylon on all the cities immediately under their rule, was adopted by the Assyrians at the end of the second millennium B.C., was used by the Jews on their return from exile, and was widely used in the Christian era. This calendar was equated with the Sumerian calendar in use at Nippur (2300–2150 B.C.)" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, article: "Calendar/Babylonian and Assyrian").

"The Babylonian…year was sometimes twelve months long, other times thirteen months long, and the cycle repeated itself every nineteen years. This system was eventually adopted by the Semites (and the Greeks) and survives today as the Jewish religious calendar" (Charles Pellegrino: *Return to Sodom and Gomorrah*, p.21). All thirteen months, using the same names as in Israel, are listed in a table of the months found at Nineveh.

The continuity of this calendar with the time before the Exodus is perhaps indicated by the precise indication given of the ages of Moses and Aaron (Ex. 7:7), and the known exact elapsed time—"the self-same day"—since their forebears entered Egypt (Ex. 12:41). God also tells Moses to consider "this month"—i.e., Abib—the first month "of your year." That is, the "calendar year" with its months pre-existed. The first time names for the months are noted is in Exodus 13:4, when the first month is called Abib, also called Nisan following the Babylonian captivity (Esth. 3:7). Abib—"green ears"—was also the name given to this month by contemporary Canaanites.

As the Jews after the Exile (fifth century BC) called many of the months by Babylonian names (Nisan, etc.), it is clear the same calendar was used there. Throughout the book of Esther, we find the same calendar in use in Ahasuerus' empire, which stretched "from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces" (Esth. 1:1). Daniel, in

Persia, used the same calendar (Dan. 10:4).

The calendar used by Moses, in other words, was widely used throughout the Gentile world from before the time of Moses and into the New Testament era—and into our day. There is no evidence it was especially "divinely revealed" for Israel. It is a humanly devised secular calendar constantly under review by the Sanhedrin.

Throughout history, intelligent vigilance was required by all nations to properly maintain the calendar. The "Julian calendar," supposedly—but perhaps erroneously—attributed to Julius Caesar, was found in the late Middle Ages to need adjustment, and ten days were added in 1582 (in England, in 1752, when eleven days were added) to match the calendar with the seasons. To keep the calendar on track, "leap years" were introduced, adding one day every four years. It is today called the "Gregorian calendar," from Pope Gregory who instituted the change.

But the Hebrew calendar has stood the test of time and is seen as quite a work of genius, on a par with modern calendars! Men of Issachar were reputedly skilled in calendar calculation (1 Chron. 12:32). They "understood the times" (Hebrew: *eth*—seasons; cf. Job 38:32). Not surprising, as calendars need constant vigilance to maintain. The Hebrew scholar Hillel II made the method of calculation of the calendar public in the mid-fourth century AD, though it was reputedly invented in the time of Simon Maccabees—c. 2 B.C.

As with all calendars, there have been occasional disputes about its accuracy—even in the time of Jesus. The Qumran community, for example, used a different calendar. Jesus never gave us an opinion on the matter. Though it is an argument from silence, it would appear He accepted the calendar then in general use, however it was formulated by the authorities—it was not an issue with Him. There is no reason to believe He would do otherwise today, even if the calendar has been modified.

The people of Israel accepted the guidance of their authorities to regulate the times of the festivals and other calendar-dependent matters: "[A]s to the new moons and those festivals that depended on them, and indeed all other computations of time, they were committed to the care of the priests and judges, and the people were obliged to abide by their calculations, whether they proved right or wrong" (*Universal History*, v. 3, p.188). It was a function of the Sanhedrin—"Moses' Seat"—a few constituent members of which were the Pharisees. It appears the formulation of an accurate calendar was therefore a skill that had to be learned and applied. It was not a divinely revealed calendar. That is, not "holy," not "the sacred calendar," not "God's calendar," but humanly devised, however skilfully.

Israel's calendar has adequately fulfilled its function for thousands of years, and to this day needs only minor adjustments to maintain its function. Israelite scholars have maintained it with some minor adjustments since the time of Moses (c. 1500 B.C.). Originally based, to some extent for symbolic religious and agricultural purposes, on annual observations, it has, as knowledge has increased, been calculated more accurately in advance for purposes of prediction—especially for the divine festivals. For example, a millennium before Christ, in the days of King Saul—David's predecessor—new moons was predictable (1 Sam. 20:5, 18).

God uses that pre-existing secular calendar for religious purposes. To impress on mankind His plans and purposes, He has had since creation a specific pattern of festivals for man to appear before Him for worship and fellowship. Reflecting God's overall purpose, the festivals focused on the physical harvests. Many nations, including the Canaanites, retained this original cycle of three harvest-based religious festivals—in spring, summer, autumn. The Creator also used "physical models" to illustrate the heavenly realities. In His chosen nation of Israel, that reality was pictured by the system of worship centered on the Tabernacle and Priesthood, and the existing calendar was adjusted to accommodate this service.

Every aspect of the true worship typified the coming Messiah, Jesus, in whom God's purpose would be perfectly fulfilled. This divine worship was unique among all religions, based on the symbolic pattern of sevens. Every seventh day is the weekly Sabbath. There are seven annual holy days, two periods of seven-day festivals, seven weeks to Pentecost, seven months of "holy day season," seven years for the land Sabbath, and seven sevens of years till the Jubilee. All of these were placed at specific times on the pre-existing calendar—which probably was as near perfect as man could then devise. However, a totally accurate calendar is irrelevant to the purpose of God in revealing His holyday plan. He simply told Moses which month on

this calendar was to be the first month of the year for religious use (Ex. 12:2): "[T]his month [it was early spring] is to be the first month of your year."

We must note, the weekly Sabbath—also a holy day (Gen. 2:3; Ex. 20:8)—is independent of the calendar and inviolate. It is every seventh day, and history (e.g., the continuity of Sabbath among Jews, and Sunday—the "first day of the week"—among Christians) attests an unbroken link since the time of Jesus and the first Christians, who all observed the same day as their Jewish contemporaries. We can assume the first-century observance had Jesus' stamp of approval! Since then, the Roman calendar has had major corrections, but the weekly sequence of days remains unbroken.

Interestingly enough, the Sabbath, though always "one day" for any individual, in fact lasts for many more hours on our round earth. For example, brethren in Anchorage, Alaska, are beginning their Sabbath some twenty hours after brethren in Wellington, New Zealand, began theirs! The same principle applies to all the holy days. For any one Christian, wherever he resides, the holy day lasts twenty-four hours, even if he is near the polar ice caps where it may remain dark for months. The "package" of sequential holy days over seven months remains intact, and overlays on whatever calendars are in use.

Anciently, when observing the beginning of a month, if no report of a new moon was reported by the thirtieth day of a month, perhaps because of atmospheric conditions, the next day was considered the *chodesh*, the new moon. This meant, for example, Trumpets could be on the second day of the new moon (Keil, ibid., p. 464). But it was still the holy day! It would also have implications for Passover. A trace of this may be seen today where some Orthodox Jews observe two days for each holy day. In 2001, for example, Rosh Hashana (Trumpets) was September 18 and 19, though the first day was the celebration—even though it could be a day early. The day is holy; but the time is not holy!

To accommodate the requirements of Sabbath observance and the divinely appointed religious ceremony, the Jewish authorities adjusted the calendar by sensible "postponements." These, for example, ensured the fast day—the Day of Atonement—would not be adjacent to a weekly Sabbath. Or, that there was always a full twenty-four hours from the sighting of the new moon in which to observe the Day of Trumpets. (It could first become visible during daylight hours.) The "intercalary month" is also a logical form of postponement to ensure the festivals remain connected to the harvest season. The changes were retained after the Temple service terminated in A.D. 70—perhaps to mimic and retain the Temple pattern.

Such postponements would at times have been necessary whether the calendar was "observed" or "calculated." However, "postponements" are irrelevant, being merely one component of authentic calendar construction. The elements of our Christian (i.e., Roman) calendar, which is recognized worldwide, is controlled by Papal authority. This authority also introduced postponements to accommodate religious practices such as Easter, and dictates when to introduce certain leap years.

All ancient calendars defined the passage of time by the moon's phases. The Jews were recorded in their writings making almost a fetish of observing the precise "new" moon—even though it's not specifically prescribed in the Law. "New moon" is *chodesh*, derived from a root meaning "to be new," and is frequently translated simply as "month" (220 times). *Chodesh* is nowhere defined in Scripture. The Jews chose to define it narrowly. Similarly, "full moon" (Hebrew: *kesed*, Ps. 81:3) refers to the waning moon—see 2 Chronicles 7:10 (Syriac version), where the term refers to the twenty-third of the month. However, the best translation for *kesed* is "in the time appointed."

Given the potential difficulties in identifying the new moon, Keil adds: "[W]e are bound to assume that there must have been some more definite mode of determining the beginning of the months and fixing the day for the festival of the new moon, although there is no mention of it in the Old Testament" (ibid., p. 464). He cites 1 Samuel 20:5 as an example of prediction.

The Bible instructs us to "count" the date for Pentecost—that is, it is not a fixed date like the other holy days. The Jews, however, do observe this holy day on a fixed date, Sivan 6. This in no way affects the construction of the calendar! It is an interpretation of the Bible instruction regarding the "calculation" of the date for the observance. Many Christian groups also interpret the text differently—some on a Monday, some on Sivan 6, the majority on a Sunday. But the underlying calendar is the

same.

The equinox can vary from March 19 to March 21. The new moon may be visible during the day. The full moon may be seen from the fourteenth to the fifteenth day since the previous new moon. It is essential that specific holy days fall on the calendar in the prescribed pattern revealed in Scripture. If our Gregorian calendar had existed, God could have placed His holy days on that just as successfully and with the same effect! What is important: the revealed pattern of worship, not our round earth's varying position in space, which determines "time."

Any quibbling over the calendar is counterproductive. It creates unnecessary disharmony and division among God's people. The dates God gave for the holy days relate to that calendar used by ancient Israel. The CGI Ministries for many years has used Arthur Spier's *Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar*, which lists all the holy days of the Jewish calendar, mapping them onto our present Gregorian calendar of today. The current edition covers from 1899 to 2100 AD, and thoroughly explains all the calendar rules the Church has con-sistently used.

The Scriptures do not define all the parameters: a "new moon" or a full moon, spring, the length of a year, when to insert a leap month, adaptation for circumstance (e.g., Josh. 10:13; 2 Kgs. 20:11), etc. Such detail was "worked out" from natural events by calendar specialists in Israel and in other nations. The "harvest" symbolism of God's festivals merely required they fall in their order in the seven-month harvest sequence, with the beginning of the religious year in Abib and the holy days thereafter in their proper sequence as revealed in Leviticus 23—however the calendar was constructed.

There is no need to postulate "divine guidance" for the construction of the calendar. And there is no evidence God did so. What's important is the festivals are observed from the heart and in reasonable approximation with the seasons. We must ask: As the holy days are an important part of our faith, why would calendar matters be obscure in both Old and New Testament? If "necessary for salvation," it would be as clear as the instruction regarding Sabbath! When we understand the calendar is "man-made" and flexible, then there is no need for concern about the manner of its construction.

There is no advantage spiritually in deviating from what essentially is a secular calendar adapted for religious use and used virtually by the whole Church of God. All are saved by God's grace; however, each answers to our Judge for our Christian conduct and attitudes, and not for our mathematical and astronomical prowess. An understanding of the secular nature of the calendar that underlies the holy days should remove cause for unnecessary division among God's people.

In summary, the Hebrew calendar is a secular, man-made tool for the measurement of the passing of time on a round earth, and is essential for purposes of agriculture, business, social interaction, and religious observance. It provides a link to the holy days revealed by God using that calendar. On it are placed in sequence God's holy-day appointments with His people, outlined in Leviticus 23, which are based around the harvest seasons. Time is not "holy"—the festival days are. We can, in all the churches of God, confidently observe God's holy days on the calendar, which the Jewish authorities have constructed.

To Know More...

Please visit www.CGIMinistries.org**.** The Search Function features articles and sermons for most of the subjects cluding "Calendar."

SIN

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Sin is the transgression of God's law—the falling short or missing the mark of the perfect faithfulness exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ. Although the penalty for sin is death in the lake of fire, all sin can be completely forgiven by God who desires that all men be saved. (The unpardonable sin is a sin for which the sinner asks no pardon.) God forgives sin upon the repentance of the individual who accepts the shed blood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ as payment in full for the penalty of his sins.

Romans 6:23; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 1:14; 1 John 3:4; 1 Peter 2:20–22; 1 John 2:6

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The most consistent and important theme of the New Testament concerning sin is God will gladly forgive any human being upon repentance and acceptance of the shed blood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and baptism. Hence, sin need not have "dominion" over a Christian (Rom. 6:12), nor must it "reign" over his life (Rom. 6:12), nor block his entrance into the Kingdom of God!

Sin is "all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 5:17); "for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV or "lawlessness," RSV). Sin, in fact, cannot be imputed when there is no law (Rom. 5:13); "where there is no law, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15).

The seventh chapter of Romans deals with the relationship between sin and law. Paul wrote, "If it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin" (Rom. 7:7). Using the tenth commandment as his example, Paul continued, "I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'" Paul explained sin is made obvious because the law condemns it. "For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and by it killed me" (v. 11).

However, this doesn't malign the law as some would quickly and erroneously conclude. Paul immediately thwarts this false concept by writing, "So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure" (vv. 12–13).

Sin is more than breaking one of the Ten Commandments in an outward, physical manner. Christ restored the law of God to include the spirit and intent of the law that God always had in mind. Likewise, this amplified the meaning of sin to include the breaking of the spirit or intent of the law through one's actions or attitudes. For example, the New Testament expands the law so just looking upon a woman to lust after her is the moral equivalent of adultery and thereby sinful; as is hating one's brother is the moral equivalent of murder, which is sinful. Thus one appearing outwardly righteous may inwardly harbor all sorts of evil.

Such external appearances of righteousness can often lead to self-righteousness. This is perhaps the most insidious of sins because it's so difficult for the person to comprehend since he "knows" or thinks he hasn't done anything wrong. Christ spoke pointedly against this type of hypocrisy, which is common to men.

Paul understood the universal power of sin. It permeates every nation, every race, every citizen of planet earth. "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God" (Rom. 3:10–11; Ps. 14:1–3; 53:1–3); "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Sin envelops every human life. On the one hand, sin includes much more than just our occasional wicked actions. On the other hand, true sinlessness is more, much more, than just the outward adherence to any set of behavioral regulations or religious rituals. Paul clearly saw his own life, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.... For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members" (Rom. 7:19, 22–23).

All is not hopeless; indeed the recognition of the full reality of the almost omnipresent problem of sin in one's life is the first step toward—indeed it's the major part of—the solution to the problem. "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 7:24–8:2).

In addition to the breaking of God's law, sin is also the result of falling short of God's way of life. The two concepts overlap greatly, but stress different approaches. There are two basic ways of life, one of "giving" and the other of "getting." God's way is the giving way, that of outgoing concern and understanding for others; it is the way of love, which is God's primary characteristic. Man's way is the way of "get," of vanity, jealousy, lust and greed; it is the way of satisfying one's own desires without care or concern of others. God defines His way by His law. When man breaks that law and thereby sins, he falls short of God's perfect way.

There are two additional biblical definitions of sin developed by Paul and James. Both relate to miss-

ing the mark of a godly oriented life. Paul wrote, "for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). This means if a person does something that his conscience tells him is wrong even though the act itself is not actually wrong in God's sight (e.g., drinking an alcoholic beverage), the very fact that the person has violated his own principles is sufficient to convert it into an actual sin. In other words, doing something that is not a sin becomes a sin if the person who does it thinks it's a sin—he defiles his conscience. This shows the critical importance God places on a person's mental attitude and approach. It also indicates the great appreciation God has for the human conscience, which He created as an efficacious tool in impelling us toward good conduct and right motives (if properly educated). To countermand one's faith violates one's conscience and risks destroying it (1 Tim. 4:2 refers to consciences "seared with a hot iron"). Furthermore, Romans 14:23 indicates there can be at least some areas of sin that are relative to the individual's attitude of mind—i.e., they may be sin to some people and not to others—thus adding one more reason not judging our brothers. (A New Testament example is eating meat that was offered beforehand as a sacrifice to an idol. This relative determination of sin is governed by conscience and does not, of course, apply to the obvious areas where God's laws are already explicitly clear.)

James referred to sins of omission when he wrote, "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is a sin" (Jas. 4:17). Therefore, sin is expanded beyond its traditional (albeit fully valid) "thou shall not" boundaries. Not doing wrong is no longer sufficient to keep one from sinning. Affirmative positive action is obligatory for an individual to do in certain situations or sin will result. If the person does not do what he knows is right (for whatever reason, e.g. laziness, inconvenience, etc.), then that is just as much a sin as directly breaking any of God's law. Not helping the poor, for example, when one is able (either by giving of one's time or resources) is a sin; not going out of your way to sacrifice and show outgoing concern for one's parents, children, spouse, relatives, friends, strangers, or enemies may violate James 4:17 and become sin if one knows something should have been done but was neglectful to do it—this is the sin of omission.

Although sin and the breaking of God's holy way of life ultimately originates in the mind, mere temptation to sin is not sin, however strong the temptation may be. Christ was tempted by Satan in all points and in every respect but never sinned (cf. Mt. 4:1; Heb. 4:15). No temptation should make a Christian feel guilty; temptations are normal, but they must be instantly resisted because the line between temptation and sin may become fine indeed. James expressed it this way: "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full grown brings forth death" (Jas. 1:14–15). As this verse and others point out, the ultimate penalty for all sin is the second death in the lake of fire (Rom. 6:23; Rev. 20:14–15).

The common penalty of death for all sin illustrates the important truth that God does not categorize sin in the ultimate spiritual sense. Some sins, of course, cause more character damage than others, or demand a more severe physical penalty, or are more depraved than others—but, spiritually speaking, all sins are equally serious because they equally demand the death penalty. One who has broken any one of God's laws is a lawbreaker—and, except for God's great mercy, is unfit for His Kingdom (James 2:10–11; note: two of the Ten Commandments are used to define God's law.)

God did not originally create sin, but by giving free moral agency to His created beings He did leave the door open for sin to be committed. One of these great beings—later named Satan the Devil—was created full of wisdom and perfect beauty (Ezek. 28:12). This being was actually perfect in his ways—until iniquity, sin, was "found in" him (Ezek. 28:15). Satan is the one who introduced sin into the universe and became the adversary of God and man (Isaiah 14). (Ultimately, God will place the full responsibility for sin on its originator. This is the meaning behind the Day of Atonement, which pictures Satan being bound after the return of Christ, so that the Millennium will be devoid of his evil influence. This was also represented in ancient Israel by sending the "scapegoat," *Azazel* in Hebrew—the goat of departure—into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:10).

Satan likewise introduced sin to mankind through Adam and Eve. Although created in moral and spiritual neutrality, Adam and his wife were deceived by Satan into disobeying God's command to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In

turn, everybody since Adam and Eve (except Jesus) have sinned and incurred the death penalty for their own sins. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned..." (Rom. 5:12).

Sin can be either by omission or commission, individual or national, affecting others or affecting only the self. But in the final analysis, all sin is against God, because God is the author of the law against which man transgresses (Ps. 51:4). While the types of sin are numerous and varied as human beings, the effects of sin are direct and specific. As explained, the final penalty for all sin is death in the lake of fire. But sin has other effects.

Sin makes people miserable; it ruins their lives and their families; it maims, devastates, and kills; it can be the cause of human sickness, misery, and suffering. This is why God hates sin so much—not because of what sin does to God, but because of what it does to sinners whom God loves. Furthermore, sin perverts the mind; it can change the values of the sinner, his point of view and outlook, and make him rationalize that he is doing right when he is actually doing wrong. Sin blinds and deceives the sinner by causing a veil to fall over his eyes so he cannot understand the reality of God's truth as expressed in the Bible. More importantly, it cuts one off from God. "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1–2).

Sin is the absolute antithesis of God, the opposite of everything He represents and for which He stands. Thus the sinner can never be given eternal life as a member of God's family until all sin has been wiped from his life—until it has been repented of and forgiven by God. This forgiveness is available only through the sacrifice of Christ upon repentance (Acts 2:38)—and it is freely and fully given to all who ask. There is no sin that God won't forgive, if the sinner is truly repentant.

Repentance is a gift from God. It comes when God opens one's eyes to recognize one's own sinfulness and to see one's life as a constant journey of self-centred vanity in defiance of God. Once one has acknowledged the reality of one's sins and has come to the heartfelt determination to change to a new life with Christ's help, one can be baptized and receive total forgiveness for those sins. But repentance is not a one-time thing. Rather, one must repent of additional sins as one becomes aware of them; the now converted Christian must confess before God on a daily basis.

It is crucial that Christians deeply realize that God does not forgive sin begrudgingly. He is quick to forgive lovingly and mercifully any repentant person of any and all sins, no matter what their magnitude, number, or frequency may be. God says He "hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust" (Ps. 103:10–14).

One with God's Spirit is under no "condemnation" whatsoever, but, regardless, he must still wrestle against sin, and on occasion he will succumb to it (cf. Rom. 7; 8:1). But conversion is a process, and a sinner may indeed sin out of weakness. However, God continues to look upon him as "holy" (Col. 3:12) because God imputes His righteousness to him through faith (Rom. 4). Only the ones who have had the burden of the penalty of sin completely lifted from their shoulders and experienced the deep exhilaration of knowing their every sin has been totally forgiven and forgotten by God can fully appreciate David's statement, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD will not impute sin" (Rom. 4:7–8; Ps. 32:1–2). Such a person has been given the "joy and gladness" that comes from having peace with God (Ps. 51:8). A forgiven Christian knows he doesn't need to feel hopeless if he sins in weakness, because God looks upon the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). He realizes God hates the sin but loves the sinners enough to have sent His only Son as their Savior. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

God can appreciate our human frailty because Jesus Christ, our mediator and intercessor, is always at His right hand. To Jesus, sin is not some theoretical theological concept; for He experienced the full

risk, pressure, and force of temptation in all points of human susceptibility (Heb. 4:15). He also experienced the full force of the penalty of sin. Though he never sinned, Jesus can well remember the enormity of the incessant battle, constantly resisting Satan's wiles and ceaselessly fighting his own human nature—it was extraordinarily relentless and the stakes were high. Jesus will never condone sin, but He does understand it—so He will never condemn the repentant Christian for it. Instead, He will always be extremely sensitive to it and desirous to make intercession to the Father to forgive it.

God in His perfect wisdom knows that not all men will repent of their sins or accept the sacrifice of Christ. Some will absolutely—consciously—decide, while knowing better, never to obey God and never to repent. Hence, a person who resists and hardens his mind against repentance is a person who cannot be forgiven, not because God won't forgive him, but because the person does not want to be forgiven. This sin against the Holy Spirit (which is the Agency by which God removes sin,) is called "unpardonable," not because God lacks the power to pardon it, but rather, because the sinner has rejected God and His Holy Spirit and refuses to ask for pardon. Those who accused Jesus of performing miracles through the power of Satan were perilously close to that ultimate hardness of heart, which refuses to repent, and refuses to ask God's pardon for sin. The lake of fire is the ultimate penalty for one who commits this unpardonable sin.

Yet it must be emphasized and understood that anyone, at any time, can and will be able to repent of any sin when he sincerely desires to be forgiven and accept Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. This is God's will for all mankind—"Not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9; cf. 1 Tim. 2:4). Even Paul, had problems with living the way he should—of missing the mark—of not having the perfect attitude or results (Rom. 7:15–23). Even he was influenced by Satan's attitudes and human covetousness. But he knew that Christ's sacrifice would forgive and cover all sin (Rom. 7:25).

Thus, the unpardonable sin is not the fearsome weapon of a sadistic God who refuses to forgive a poor sinner that made a few mistakes out of weakness. Actually, it is the opposite. Anyone, at any time, can and will be able to repent of any and all sins simply by desiring to be forgiven and accepting the blood of Christ as payment in full for the penalty of those sins. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:22). It is only in Jesus Christ that "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us" (Eph. 1:7). Redemption is through "the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18–19), with which converted Christians were (and are continuously being) washed from their sins (Rev. 1:5–6). The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was "for all time a single sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 10:12) because His life, as Creator of everything (Col. 1:16), was more important than all other lives put together.

In connection with the topic of sin, many skeptics and sincere believers alike through the centuries have wondered why God allows sin to exist: "If God is both all good and all powerful," they ask, "why does He allow such terrible evils on earth?" The answer is actually rooted in the biblically stated purpose of human life, rather than in the philosophically structured arguments of intellectual human reasoning and tradition.

Through man, God is reproducing Himself. In order to enable man to build righteous character, God created his mind with free moral agency. This means human beings have been given the right and capacity to make their own choices and guide their own actions, thoughts, and lives. Therefore, in effect, God has given man both the right and capacity to do evil—but all for the reason of accomplishing His purpose. For in allowing man to commit evil, God enables man to learn a great lesson from the experience of the evil: that disobedience to God's ways, laws, and principles will produce horrendous results. Once man has thoroughly and completely learned this hard, painful lesson of behavioral history—that disobedience to God produces destruction and death—he will never rebel against God, because he recognises such rebellion produces only corruption, calamity, and eternal death (Rom. 6:23).

While we need to deeply recognize the presence of sin in our lives as highlighted by God's law, *we need to forgive and put it out of our mind*, just as God does (Ps. 103:12). This applies to both our own sins and the sins of others. One of the most common problems for true Christians, having been trained in, and imprinted by, puritanically based Western culture, is

the continuing guilt complex over past sins even after they are fully repented of and buried with Christ. As far as God is concerned, He sees no reason why the repentant person should feel guilty since God Himself will not bring these up again. Therefore, Christians should grow toward achieving the same attitude regarding their own sins and (equally important) the sins of others. It would be foolish to put a temptation before a brother who is overcoming sin. For instance, we don't create situations where a recovering child-abuser is assigned child care duties for the church kids! Similarly, we don't consume alcohol when socializing with a friend or brother who has struggled with alcohol in the past. These actions are not "dredging up past sins," but instead are showing love to our brother. Part of the concept of "overcoming" sin is having the understanding and sensitivities that we (and our brothers) sometimes struggle with the same old habits or temptations—sometimes for our whole lives.

Certainly sin affects all of us because it's common to the human experience—all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). But sin—however heinous and antithetical to God's way—has become an intimate part of God's plan of reproducing Himself through mankind. God's forgiveness—the greatest expression of His total loving kindness and mercy—is the perfect antidote that completely nullifies and makes void Satan's efforts at turning man from his Creator. Nonetheless, we are reminded by James not to dismiss the importance of proving our faith by what we do (Jas. 2:22) because we know the doers, not the hearers of the law, will be justified (Rom. 2:13).

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