

THE SEVEN MYTHS OF DENOMINATIONALISM

by David B. Brown

Brown's critique of denominationalism in Christianity, identifying and refuting seven common myths used to justify the division of Christ's church into competing denominations.

77 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 000 - Preface
2. 01 - Myth 1: The Bible is Too Complicated to Understand
3. 01.01 - Why Believe or Teach This?
4. 01.02 - What the Bible Says
5. 01.03 - Supporting Evidence
6. 01.04 - Bible Complexity
7. 01.05 - You Can Prove Anything with the Bible
8. 01.06 - Why People Do Not Understand
9. 01.07 - Conclusion
10. 02 - Myth 2: The Old Testament is Just as Binding as the New Testament
11. 02.01 - Why is This Important
12. 02.02 - Are We Under the New Testament
13. 02.03 - The Truthfulness and Value of the Old Testament
14. 02.04 - Importance Revisited
15. 03 - Myth 3: We Are Saved by Faith Only
16. 03.01 - Why is This Important?
17. 03.02 - Definitions
18. 03.03 - Why Not Faith Only?
19. 03.04 - What the Bible Teaches About Faith Only
20. 03.05 - What it Means to be Saved by Faith
21. 03.06 - What Then Are We Saved By?
22. 03.06.01 - Entering Into a Covenant Relationship with God
23. 03.06.02 - Keeping Ourselves Saved
24. 04 - Myth 4: Baptism is of Secondary Importance
25. 04.01 - Why all the Fuss? - Definitions
26. 04.02 - What the Bible Says About Baptism
27. 04.02.01 - The Gospels
28. 04.02.02 - The Book of Acts
29. 04.02.03 - The Letters to the Churches
30. 04.02.04 - Other Baptisms
31. 04.02.04.01 - Baptism of the Holy Spirit
32. 04.02.04.02 - Baptism of Fire
33. 04.02.04.03 - Baptism for the Dead
34. 04.02.04.04 - The Baptism of John
35. 04.02.04.05 - Other Mentions of Baptism
36. 04.03 - Common Objections Against Baptism
37. 04.03.01 - Salvation is Not by Works
38. 04.03.02 - The Thief on the Cross
39. 04.03.03 - Paul Not Sent to Baptize

40. 04.03.04 - Conversions Which Do Not Mention Baptism
41. 04.03.05 - If a Person Got Killed on the Way to Baptism...
42. 04.04 - Is This Important?
43. 05 - Myth 5: Love is All You Need
44. 05.01 - Do We Love?
45. 05.02 - Love Defined
46. 05.02.01 - Greek Definitions
47. 05.02.02 - Biblical Definitions
48. 05.03 - Old Testament Love Extended
49. 05.04 - Making Love a Reality
50. 05.05 - Can We be Saved by Love Only?
51. 06 - Myth 6: The Rapture, The RAPTURE, THE RAPTURE
52. 06.01 - A Most Popular Doctrine
53. 06.02 - A Proposed Scenario
54. 06.03 - Scriptural View of Judgment
55. 06.03.01 - The Gospels
56. 06.03.02 - The Book of Acts
57. 06.03.03 - The Letters to the Churches
58. 06.03.04 - The Book of Revelation
59. 06.03.05 - A Review of Our Scenario
60. 06.04 - More on the Chaining of Satan
61. 06.05 - On the Kingdom
62. 06.06 - On the Rapture
63. 06.07 - Is This Important?
64. 07 - Myth 7: Original Sin
65. 07.01 - Definition of Terms
66. 07.02 - Original Sinlessness
67. 07.03 - When we Fall
68. 07.04 - Misapplies Scriptures
69. 07.05 - Consequences of Original Sin Doctrine
70. 08 - Chapter 8: Where Does This Leave Us?
71. 08.01 - So What?
72. 08.02 - The Alternatives
73. 08.02.01 - Redirection and Evolution
74. 08.02.02 - Restoration
75. 08.03 - The Nature of Local Churches
76. 08.04 - Reversing the Trend
77. 08.05 - Some Concluding Thoughts

000 - Preface

PREFACE The purpose of this book is to increase bible study by those who are disciples of Jesus Christ. This study will greatly enrich all that participate, and it will lead to a greater respect for the Word of God. I am not so arrogant as to think that my conclusions regarding the holy scriptures are the only ones acceptable to God. However, the average church member in the denominational world has never considered some of the major truths of God's word. For that reason they are accepting, practicing and teaching many false doctrines that were inherited from the Roman Catholic church or that have evolved since the reformation. Most alarming, the average members have been so conditioned by emotionalism that they seem no longer to care. This book is for the average member of denominational churches. The author was raised in a denomination and taught by family and church not to challenge the religious beliefs of others. This is the essence of the problem. For our failure to challenge the beliefs of others very quickly leads to a failure to challenge our own beliefs. "If everyone else is all right, then I must be all right as well." This is a sure formula for complacency and ignorance.

Many have been conditioned to believe that it just does not matter what we believe or practice. If so, there is no reason to bother studying or discussing biblical truth. But the bible itself states emphatically that it does matter. As you read the scriptures quoted in this book, this will become quite clear. We plead with you to allow these scriptures to find their way into the fertile soil of an open and contrite heart. Your eternal destiny depends on it. Our country is in a major moral crisis due to a lack of regard for biblical teaching. Well over 30 million abortions have been performed since it was legalized, eclipsing Hitler's holocaust. Homosexuality and other forms of sexual deviancy are being rationalized and taught in our public schools as "alternative life styles." Teen pregnancy has soared. Marriage for life has become the exceptional family mode. Gambling has become the politicians' tax of choice. Our airwaves are flooded with pornography. Our jails are overflowing, and the only solution that the politicians are proposing is to build more. Drugs and alcoholic beverages dominate our recreational activities. We could go on and on, but if these obvious alarms do not wake up the reader, nothing will. We can continue to bury our heads in the sand, or we can begin looking for the only solution: Christ.

What has this to do with the myths of denominationalism? The denominations have failed to teach the truth on some of the most fundamental and obvious of biblical truths. Is it any wonder that they flounder with regard to the moral issues which plague our country? If the bible is not the standard of authority with regard to our salvation and our relationship with God, then why should we trust it with regard to these moral issues? We will prove that the denominations have rejected the bible as their standard of authority. Thus, members have drawn the most logical of conclusions: "the bible should not deter us from doing exactly what we want to do when we want to do it." While we do not deny that there are notable exceptions, any objective, unbiased observer would agree that this is the predominant attitude in our country today.

If this book should find some degree of success, we fully expect that it will be cited as a divisive instrument of the devil by popular denominational teachers. Those familiar with the New Testament will recognize that this is identical to the reception that the religious rulers of Jesus' day gave Him (Mat 12:24; Mat 22:15-45). He clearly taught that His followers would have to suffer the very same treatment that he suffered (Rom 8:17).

We fully recognize that this does not prove the validity of our assertions -- many cults and devil-worshippers are rejected (and some persecuted), and they are far from the truth. On the other hand, the fact that the vast majority believes something does not make it right (Mat 7:13-14). It is God's word and God's word alone that determines the truth (Rom 3:4). We only ask that the doctrines put forward in this book be evaluated in that light. To those who feel that this is just all negative, please recognize that it is impossible to assert a positive without being negative toward the opposite position. Read Mat 23:1-39. Jesus teachings were opposed at every turn by the religious establishment of His day, but He did not stop because His teachings were considered negative toward them.

It is not our intent to be divisive -- in fact, those who consider themselves part of Christianity are so divided now that further division would seem impossible. The basic structure of denominationalism itself is the main reason for this, as we will show in Chapter 1. As you consider this book and the criticism of it, ask yourself: who is interested in the truth, and who is interested in maintaining the status quo? Who is benefiting from the current ignorance of God's word? What are they doing to perpetuate the myths, and why? As in Jesus day, the answers are tied closely to political and economic power of a leadership that can only be sustained by the enslavement of their followers in ignorance (John 8:32). Those who love the truth will appreciate criticism of current practices and teachings which are inconsistent with Gods holy word.

We do not want you to believe anything that we write without scriptural evidence. We hope you will challenge everything in this book. Other than the scriptural quotations, this is not an inspired work; to claim such would be sinful and would curse this author with the plagues written in the book of Revelation (Rev 18:22-23). Believe only God's word; for it, and it alone, is capable of "thoroughly furnishing you unto every good work" (2Ti 3:16-17). If I am wrong, correct me as you would a brother. If this book does nothing but get some to read and study the bible (even to defeat what is taught here) it will accomplish its mission.

Before continuing, please consider some basic definitions to get us started, and some comments on the version of God's word that we will use for quotations.

DEFINITIONS To assure a common understanding, it is important that we define terms before proceeding. When we say myths we are referring to erroneous but commonly-accepted beliefs. To identify a myth we need only compare it with the truth of God's word. If it is obvious that it contrasts with the clear teaching of the bible, then it is a myth. We have tried to deal with those which are most vulnerable (see chapter headings). These myths are not universally accepted by all members of all denominations. No doctrines are. There are always exceptions, and perhaps you (or your entire group) do not believe the myths stated in some of the chapters. If so, we commend you for your stand against the majority and for the truth. However, if you are in fellowship with general denominational teachings, you cannot help but being sympathetic with their generally-accepted doctrines; we urge you to teach your friends and neighbors the truth.

It should be clear that we are not saved by myths, no matter how much we might believe them to be true (Mat 7:21-23). No greater injustice can be done to a person than to lead him to believe that he is saved when, in fact, he is not. The propagation of myths as faith in God is evil, and those who do so will give an accounting of it before God (Jas 3:1-2). When we use the term denominationalism we are referring to the general teachings (doctrines) of the collective of those religious organizations which consider themselves denominations of the universal church of Christ. Of course, there is no such written doctrine, since the denominations do not formulate common doctrine. However, there are a set of beliefs which have come to be known as "traditional Christian beliefs." Certainly, we are not asserting that all of these are myths. However, we are asserting that these traditional doctrines contain significant myths to the point that they lead people to believe that they are saved when, in fact, they are not. The verb denominate is used throughout this book with the meaning of to give a name to with the intent of distinguishing one group from another. Thus, a denomination is a religious organization which has been distinguished from all others by the assignment of a unique name. Those organizations which have as one of their beliefs that they (as an organization) are part of the universal church of Christ (along with all others) will be called the denominations. The doctrines which are generally accepted by all of these groups will be collectively referenced as denominationalism.

QUOTATIONS

Biblical quotations are from the King James version of the Holy Bible. This is not an endorsement of the King James version -- we have chosen it because it is the most widespread and available valid version. We believe that God's divine providence has assured that the truth can be ascertained from any valid translation. By valid we mean a translation which was objectively interpreted from the most ancient available manuscripts by a diverse team of objective Greek and Hebrew scholars. We discourage the use of paraphrases since they tend to bias the reader in favor of the writer's viewpoint. In addition, it should be obvious that if an entire team of the translators have the same religious bias, or if the translation cannot be accepted by objective Greek and Hebrew scholars, it should be discarded as invalid. Since all translations are subject to the errors of men, no translation is perfect. However, the truths essential to salvation can be ascertained from any valid translation. The only modification which we have made to the King James version is the substitution of Holy Spirit for Holy Ghost. We feel that this change will be much more meaningful to the average reader, being consistent with the common name applied to this member of the Godhead.

Brackets [] will be found in many of the quoted scriptures. These are words that were inserted by the translators in an attempt to capture the true meaning (as opposed to the inference of a literal translation). In most King James versions of the bible these are in italics; however, we use brackets since italics are used for emphasis in contemporary English writings, which is just the opposite of the intent of the translators.

We recognize the inconvenience of many to look up the scriptures, and so, as much as possible, we will include the scriptural reference when we give it (unlike the introductory material above). However, we plead with you to go to the bible and read the passage in its context to assure that it is not being mis-applied. We read all kinds of religious materials that are loaded with scriptural references -- this does not prove that it is scriptural. Those scriptures could be misapplied and

misused -- they might not even apply to the subject. For purposes of convenience we will often cite the author of a given passage as being the apostle or prophet who dictated or wrote it. However, it should be understood that in doing so we are not trying to state that these things were not inspired by the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul stated in 1Co 2:13: "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual."

Finally, we urge you to be wary of those who take issue with us to the extent that they discourage or would prevent you from conducting your own independent personal study. The bible teaches only one way to build faith: "So then faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). The only way that you can be defeated and enslaved is if someone can convince you that they are the authority rather than God's word. This subject is considered further in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2

01 - Myth 1: The Bible is Too Complicated to Understand

CHAPTER 1 MYTH 1: THE BIBLE IS TOO COMPLEX TO UNDERSTAND

01.01 - Why Believe or Teach This?

1.1 WHY BELIEVE OR TEACH THIS?

Many honest people really believe this myth, but anyone who has diligently studied the bible knows that it is both false and totally enslaving. However, as long as false teachers can convince their followers that the bible is too complex for the average person to understand, they can control their beliefs. When people go directly to the source of truth, they cannot be enslaved. Jesus said: "If ye continue in my word, [then] are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

Based upon the author's own upbringing, which consistently discouraged any inquiry of false religious doctrines as divisive, we expect that many reading this chapter will feel that it is not an attempt to unify but to divide. We urge you to look beyond these most prevalent attitudes and consider the fact that there is but one reality, one truth. If we believe that the bible is from God, then we must believe that it is His attempt to communicate that one reality to us. We cannot have it both ways. If we believe that this is His attempt to communicate reality to us, then we must believe that He has the capacity to communicate it to us in the most effective way. Anything short of this is a denial of His love for us. The myth of bible complexity takes many alternative forms: (1) we cannot understand the bible alike, (2) everyone has their own interpretation, (3) we do not want to be legalists like the Pharisees, (4) you can prove anything with the bible, etc., etc. All of these have the same thing in common: they are personal excuses to avoid independent study of the only source of spiritual truth upon the face of this earth: God's word. The apostle Paul was addressing the question: "What advantage then hath the Jew?" in Rom 3:1. His reply was: "Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom 3:2). At that time the only oracles that the Jews had were the written Old Testament scriptures. Their advantage accrued from their possession of the written word of God. However, they failed to benefit from this great advantage. Why? Was it because the bible is too complex to understand? No! Let us read on ...

Rom 3:3-4: "For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar." Once again, the only source of spiritual truth upon the face of this earth is God's word. The Jews failed to take advantage of the oracles of God, not because they could not understand them, but because they would not believe them.

Truism: you cannot believe in something if you do not know what that something is. Many declare that they believe the bible but rarely read it and never study it. How can people claim to believe the bible when, in fact, they are merely taking other peoples' word for what it says? What you are told by someone else that it says may or may not be true: "Let God be true, but every man a liar." (We recognize that this applies doubly to books such as this one, and we urge you to challenge every word of it in light of the standard!) It is essential that we study the bible for ourselves: God demands it. Otherwise, by definition, our faith is in the word of man, not the word of God.

Why believe or teach this? The answer to both questions have one characteristic in common: ignorance. If we are ignorant of God's word and wish to remain ignorant of it, then the myth of bible complexity is a comforting one. For, if we believe that the bible is too complex to understand, then why should we make any attempt to understand it? We recognize that some teach this myth out of a real conviction -- they really believe it. However, those who have studied the bible and recognize its clear structure and basic simplicity must have other motives. Independent bible study will reveal that there is no such thing as a clergy class within the church. There is no need for someone to be educated at a university of divinity and "ordained" to make the word of God understandable to the common man. (Usually the effect is just the opposite.) However, as long as the clergy can convince others of this myth, they can easily influence them to accept traditional beliefs of men as opposed to those of God. The psychological effect of believing this myth is devastating. After all, if the bible is too complicated to understand, why try? Most leap to this comfortable conclusion and go for weeks and months without independent bible study. In this chapter we will show that this myth is not only untrue, it is one of the most devastating tools of the devil to keep us from learning the very truth that will free us from his grasp.

01.02 - What the Bible Says

1.2 WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

[Before starting this section allow us to take a few lines here to explain the meaning of the word mystery as used in many passages of the New Testament, several of which we will quote shortly. According to Vine's An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, this word does not refer to something which is complex or difficult to understand. Rather, it refers to something which was hidden prior to being revealed by God. As an example, if I asked you to guess what was in my pocket, this would be a mystery prior to its revelation. However, once I pulled out a handkerchief, this would not be at all difficult to understand. The totally counterintuitive nature of the New Testament teaching clearly demonstrates that it could not have originated in the mind of man. However, once revealed it is not difficult to understand by those who have an honest desire to understand it. Jesus said to his largely un-educated disciples (Mark 4:11): "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all [these] things are done in parables ..." Even the parables were not difficult to understand for those who are seeking the truth; indeed, the purpose of parables was to present spiritual principles in the clearest possible way for those with honest, seeking hearts. A by-product was the virtual impossibility of their comprehension by those who were not seeking truth.

While there are times when the word mystery applies to specific parts of the New Testament, it generally refers to the gospel in its entirety. In these cases, however, a part of the gospel (including some of the most counterintuitive aspects) is used to illustrate the necessity for revelation. To illustrate one such example, the mystery in Eph 3:5 is defined in the next verse (Eph 3:6): "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel ..." While this is certainly not difficult to understand, the racial barriers that still divide the vast majority of the religious world demonstrate that this is still a mystery (hidden) to all those who do not accept the full gospel of Jesus Christ.] The myth that the bible is too complex to understand is exploded by the Apostle Paul when he said: "... by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)" (Eph 3:3-4). This teaches that we can and should have the same understanding as the apostle Paul had. Does anyone today claim to have a better understanding than the apostle Paul had? Do we need to have a better understanding than he did to be saved?

Why would the bible have been written in the first place if it were only going to generate controversy because it is too hard to understand? The reason that it was written, however, is not left to our speculation. Again, the apostle Paul instructing the younger Timothy (2Ti 3:16-17):

All scripture [is] given by inspiration of God, and [is] profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Now if the scriptures have the capacity to "thoroughly furnish us unto all good works," what happens when we ignore them and look elsewhere to determine what is and is not a good work? Can anyone read the passage quoted above and believe that the apostle Paul thought that the scriptures were too difficult for the common man to understand? In the preface we introduced the fact that the one and only way that the bible indicates that we can produce faith within ourselves is through hearing the word of God (Rom 10:17): "So then faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." This theme recurs throughout the New Testament, and it is critical to our salvation that we know and understand what produces faith. We will take up the subject of faith in Chapter 3; for now, we wish to confirm that to obtain the faith that saves, we must hear the truth that is written in the bible. The apostle John provides the authority for this conclusion (John 20:30-31): "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." Did John think we would have the capacity to understand what he wrote?

Those who think they have created faith within themselves by some means other than a study of God's word have faith in something, but it is not faith in God. Some trust their experiences, their charismatic leaders, humanism and the wisdom of man. But those are not God's ways for granting us faith. The apostle Paul makes it quite clear that it is the gospel (good news) of Christ which is the sole basis for salvation in Rom 1:16-17: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." No one in the bible was ever chastised for honest bible study -- the bible never discourages anyone from independently studying the bible for himself or herself and thereby "working out their salvation with fear and trembling" (Php 2:12). The bible has no such motive; only men possess motivation in the direction of discouraging independent study. The thrust of the scriptures are in the opposite direction as exemplified by Paul's command to Timothy (1Ti 2:15): "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Neither is there ever a stigma on challenging our religious leaders by comparing their teaching to the scriptures. Consider Acts 17:10-12: And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming [thither] went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

Note three points from this passage:

1. Those of Berea were more noble because they "searched the scriptures" and validated the teaching of no less a teacher than the apostle Paul himself. If they were noble for checking up on an inspired apostle, we should not be intimidated from challenging our teachers today to provide book, chapter and verse for what they are putting forth. The burden of proof is upon the teacher, and the standard of proof is the written word of God.
2. "Therefore, many of them believed." Note once again that the honest study of God's word produces faith, a recurring theme throughout the New Testament.

3. As is true today, there were many false teachers in the first century. The test of validity was one of consistency with that which had already been revealed and written down: the scriptures. How much more is this the standard in a day and age when multiple copies of the Holy Scriptures are in each of our homes? The scriptures were recognized as the standard of authority even in the first century when the Holy Spirit was directly inspiring the apostles and prophets to reveal the truths of the New Testament. Can anyone argue that God expected them to understand the scriptures? Since we know that God is not a respecter of persons, we know that he expects that same thing of us today. As the New Testament was being compiled from recognized inspired writings, it became the standard of authority for the churches in the first century. The apostle Peter made this clear when he expressed the purpose of his writing (2Pe 3:1-2): "This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in [both] which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior."

We also know this from the writings of the apostle Paul (1Co 14:37-38): "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant." This cannot be misunderstood! The written words of the apostle Paul are the commandments of Jesus. Do you think that Paul or Peter thought they were too complex to understand? I realize that this destroys a cherished myth that is believed by many in the denominational world. But these are not difficult passages to understand. If we refuse to recognize that the writings of Paul (and the other inspired writers) are the commandments of the Lord, then what else can be said of us other than that we are willfully ignorant? "But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant."

01.03 - Supporting Evidence

1.3 SUPPORTING EVIDENCE In addition to the scriptures given above which clearly teach that the revelation of God can only be attained from a study of His written word, the bible contains mountains of supporting evidence which attest and further supports this conclusion. The bible is the most efficient book ever written; it guides us to every possible good work (2Ti 3:16-17) while containing absolutely no useless information. Jesus infers this in Mat 4:4: "But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Indeed, Jesus' respect for the written word must be mirrored in His followers. His statements with regard to the Old Testament law gives us confidence that the providence of God is active in preserving His written word (Mat 5:17-18): "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." [The jot (YODH) was the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet; the tittle, the smallest stroke.] We do not have to worry about the Old Testament, and if God can preserve that, He will surely preserve the New. This was also assured by Jesus in Mat 24:35: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

Why, then, do the very same teachers who want you to believe that the bible is too complicated to understand so often talk about lost books, defective translations, and the like? They point to the most difficult passages which may have awkward and archaic translations. Why? Is it not to create doubt in the written word in order to convince you to accept their doctrines? Surely no dispersions such as these appear in the scriptures themselves.

Jesus expected his contemporaries to understand the scriptures. He chastised them for their apparently deliberate misunderstanding. Over and over again he responded, not with what he had the authority to dictate to them directly, but with the voice of scripture. Open your bible and look at the number of times that Jesus and the apostles referred to the Old Testament scriptures in their teachings. It is obvious that they believed that those who they were teaching already understood (or could easily ascertain) these references in the identically same way as they did. In those cases where this was not true, those who misunderstood were held accountable for their error. As an example of this, consider the incident in which Jesus corrected the error of the Sadducees with regard to the resurrection (Mat 22:29-33):

Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And when the multitude heard [this], they were astonished at his doctrine.

Let us observe the following from this passage:

1. Jesus did not teach that the scriptures were too difficult to understand -- he charged the Sadducees with the responsibility to understand the concept of the "resurrection of the dead" from the Old Testament scriptures.
2. Jesus stated that they should have understood because of the tense of a verb. Had God said "I was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" then it could be concluded that they were no longer in existence. However, since He said "I am the God ..." this indicated that they were still alive (in spirit).
3. The difference in the Hebrew between "am" and "was" is based upon the presence or absence of one word; in the Greek manuscript that he quoted it was just a few letters. Thus, Jesus was basing His argument on the accuracy of the manuscripts then in existence (recall Mat 5:17-18 quoted above).
4. Jesus could have appealed to His miraculous ability, or even performed a miracle, but when it came to the resolution of doctrine which had already been revealed, He appealed to "that which was written." So should we. As you study these passages, keep asking yourself the question: Does God expect us to avail ourselves of the most published book in history? As another example, consider the story of Lazarus and the rich man. There is some disagreement as to whether this passage is a parable or an actual story, but that is inconsequential here. We are attempting to ascertain whether God expects us to understand His written word today and use it to determine His plan for our lives. The complete story is given in Luk 16:1-31 beginning with the 19th verse. To summarize: after his death, the rich man was in torment and, upon finding out that there was no longer hope for his own relief, he asked Abraham if he could send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his brothers. Let us pick up the reading in Luk 16:27:

Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Observe the following from this passage:

1. The only way that they "had Moses and the prophets" was through their reading of the Old Testament scriptures.
2. "Let them hear them" clearly demonstrates that Jesus attributed to Abraham the expectation that they should have read and understood the Old Testament in order to determine the will of God.
3. The final statement clearly shows that "faith cometh through hearing," and if an individual will not allow the written word of God to produce faith, then even the most definitive of miracles will not avail. Indeed, One did rise from the dead, but those who did not have the will to be persuaded by Moses and the prophets would not be convinced even by Jesus' resurrection. As we consider the importance that Jesus placed upon the Old Testament for determining God's will, can we really

believe that the bible is too complicated to understand? (Recognize that while Jesus was upon the earth, the New Testament had not yet been written.) The Old Testament was less accessible to them, but Jesus expected them to know and understand it. How much more are we responsible for knowing the gospel by which we will be judged? As we read through the New Testament we see reference after reference to the written word of God (generally the Old Testament) even as the New Testament was being written. In no case is anyone discouraged from studying it, and in all cases it is held in the highest esteem. As an example, the apostle Paul concludes his letter to Christians at Rome with the following statement: (Rom 16:25): "Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, [be] glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen."

[Recall the discussion of the word mystery at the beginning of Section 1.2.]

Another example is the charge that Paul gave to the Thessalonians near the end of his first letter to them (1Th 5:27): "I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren." Clearly Paul expected every member of the church to understand his writings. As a final bit of supporting evidence, consider the final warning of the bible: Rev 22:18-19: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and [from] the things which are written in this book." If God did not expect us to understand the bible, why would He warn us not to add to it or take away from it?

Despite the claim of inspiration of many false teachers to this day, the pure word of God has been preserved from the first century. Not one word has been added to it or deleted from it, despite all of the attempts to alter it. Many have dared to defy the threat of God; none have succeeded. Their counterfeit scriptures have been easy to detect, some even bordering on the absurd.

01.04 - Bible Complexity

1.4 BIBLE COMPLEXITY With all of this evidence that the bible is both understandable and the source of all spiritual truth, we might be tempted to conclude that it is trivial (i.e., not worthy of our time to study). Those who neglect to study it because they think it is "just common sense" make this mistake as well. In reality, the bible is a very challenging book. The apostle Peter referring to the writings of Paul stated "in which are some things hard to be understood" (2Pe 3:16). The following presents that context of this statement beginning with 2Pe 3:14 :

Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account [that] the longsuffering of our Lord [is] salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all [his] epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as [they do] also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know [these things] before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and [in] the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him [be] glory both now and for ever. Amen.

Note the following from this passage:

1. The apostle Peter had a very high regard for the writings of the apostle Paul; by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he placed them in the category of "scripture."
2. Some of the things that Paul wrote were "hard to be understood." This implies that other things were not hard to understand.
3. Not the faithful but the unlearned and unstable "wrested" or twisted these scriptures unto their own destruction. Who was responsible for misunderstanding the writings of Paul (even though admittedly they were difficult to understand)?

We have been emphasizing that the bible is capable of being understood, while clearly the scripture quoted immediately above states that certain parts are difficult to understand. It is easy to reconcile these two views. Peter did not say that all things were hard to be understood. There is a difference between "hard to be understood" and "too complex to understand." We can be safe in concluding that parts of God's word are quite simple, while others are much more challenging. The distinction between the simple (milk) and the difficult (meat) was understood by all of the biblical writers. The apostle Paul indicated that this was correlated with the spiritual maturity of the reader or hearer (1Co 3:1-2): "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, [even] as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able [to bear it], neither yet now are ye able." The distinction is between the milk of the word, which is easily digested, as opposed to the meat, which requires more maturity for its discernment. The writer of the book of Hebrews indicated that time was necessary for maturing process to take place. He chastised the Hebrew Christians for not maturing as they should have

(Heb 5:12-14): "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which [be] the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk [is] unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, [even] those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

There is a lesson here for both the weak and the strong. To the babe in Christ: God expects us to be obedient in all things which we understand to be His will (Heb 5:9): "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." It is our job, not just to believe that He exists but also to diligently seek him (Heb 11:6): "But without faith [it is] impossible to please [him]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and [that] he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Growth is an essential part of the life of the Christian, and this requires the addition of knowledge (2Pe 1:5): "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge." To those who freely feed upon the meat of God's word, it should be recognized that you never "arrive." Indeed, it was those who had the most knowledge of God's word who were the recipients of the harshest rebuke from our savior (Mat 23:23): "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier [matters] of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. [Ye] blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." Note, however, that it was not their study of God's word that produced this attitude. Their misunderstanding of the scriptures had nothing to do with the scriptures being difficult. No one who is self-serving will ever allow himself to understand the writings of God. However, their error was not study per se; their error was that they went to the bible solely to prove their preconceived ideas (see John 5:30-47). The fact that the bible cannot be totally mastered is further evidence that its author was none other than God. Moreover, the fact that its first principles are so simple only adds to this evidence. "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2Co 11:3) ... which introduces another way of expressing the myth of complexity: the myth that you can prove anything with the bible.

01.05 - You Can Prove Anything with the Bible

1.5 SUBMYTH: YOU CAN PROVE ANYTHING WITH THE BIBLE To illustrate this we might cite the scriptures (Mat 27:5) "And he [Judas] cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself." Then (Luk 3:11) "... let him do likewise." Or the famous words of Job's wife (Job 2:9) "... curse God, and die." Obviously, words taken out of context can be twisted to produce absurd teachings. But what does this prove? Give me the simplest of writings and I can do the same. Thus, should we conclude that no writings can be understood? Such reasoning demonstrates ulterior motives. God expects us to use the basic common sense which he has given to every normal human being. This submyth is just another way of rationalizing ignorance of God's word. After all, if clever teachers can prove anything by quoting scriptures, why should the average person give it any credibility at all? The problem with the statement "you can prove anything ..." is that it is in large part true when speaking of those who are wilfully ignorant. As we observed from Peter when speaking of some of Paul's more difficult writings, he said (2Pe 3:16): "which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as [they do] also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." It is clear that not only the difficult but also the simple scriptures are wrested by the ignorant and steadfast to lead those with itching ears (2Ti 4:3) to proceed in whatever direction in which they have already set their hearts. So the bible itself confirms that our section title is partially true, and thus the danger. But before we swallow this fable hook, line, and sinker, let us explore the part of it that is false. The old adage comes to mind: you can fool some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time ... In fact, you cannot prove any false doctrine with the bible to someone who is proficient in God's word. In most cases false doctrines are proven to those who already wish to believe them, and they will accept even the lamest, most illogical proof provided it is the same as their preconceived ideas. However, in other cases false teachers are very adept at the manipulation of both their followers and God's word to produce the effects that they desire.

Warnings with regard to false teachers are so numerous that we invite the reader to pick a point at random in the New Testament and read five chapters in a row. The chances of a warning against one in any given five pages is very high. The references to false teachers are difficult to avoid, but we must study the scriptures to recognize when a false teacher is misapplying a verse from God's word.

Appealing to the bible itself, we see absolutely no evidence that the stable and honest disciple will be readily deceived by those who twist the scriptures to their own destruction. We see absolutely no disrespect for God's word because "it can prove anything." Finally, we see absolutely no discouragement for the study of God's word for this reason. The inevitable conclusion is that those who make this appeal are either excusing their own ignorance or discouraging study by others. They have no greater prospect than to live their lives out in slavery and servitude to the devil (John 8:32).

01.06 - Why People Do Not Understand

1.6 WHY PEOPLE DO NOT UNDERSTAND

There is a reason that most people do not understand God's word, but it has nothing to do with intellectual ability or the difficulty of the scriptures. The following story provides enlightenment in this regard (Mat 13:10-17): And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and [their] ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with [their] eyes and hear with [their] ears, and should understand with [their] heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed [are] your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous [men] have desired to see [those things] which ye see, and have not seen [them]; and to hear [those things] which ye hear, and have not heard [them].

Jesus places the responsibility for understanding upon the individual. When we say that we cannot understand it (or tell others that they cannot), we shift the blame for our ignorance from ourselves to God. For, if the bible is too difficult for us to understand and understand alike, then the fault for this must lie with the maker -- for He made both us and His word. I am not ready to blame God for my ignorance of His word, are you?

One of the tenderest and most moving passages in the bible is found in Mat 11:25-29: At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and [he] to whomsoever the Son will reveal [him]. Come unto me, all [ye] that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke [is] easy, and my burden is light.

Jesus is calling us all today through His word (John 6:45) "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." If you study the bible with no other intent but to find what God's will is for you, you will have no problem in understanding what you need. God will change your life, what you most desire, and what you expect to find each time you open His word. Certain parts of it will be difficult to understand at first, but with maturity which comes from digesting the milk, you will soon be able to partake of the meat.

01.07 - Conclusion

1.7 CONCLUSION This introductory chapter is merely a sampling of the scriptures which demonstrate that God expects us to understand His written word. Once you get into it you will recognize that page after page reinforces this basic theme: the holy scriptures are able to make you wise unto salvation. Paul stated to Timothy (2Ti 3:15): "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." The ramifications of this simple fact are enormous in terms of organized religion. Simply put: we do not need organizations of men or a clergy class to tell us what God's word means. We will see what the bible teaches with regard to our organizing ourselves later. At this point we need to revisit the thoughts of Section 1.1. As long as you believe that God's word is too difficult for you to understand, you will make no effort to understand it for yourself, and you will be enslaved to whatever doctrine persuasive false teachers wish you to believe. A few of these are discussed in the remaining chapters of this book. We will see that the word of God is not common sense -- that it is as far from the intuition of man as darkness is from light. The bible is not a spurious and unnecessary book. It is as essential to faith as faith is to salvation (Rom 10:17).

If you do not agree with the basic premise of this chapter, there is really no use reading any further. For, the remaining chapters assume that the reader agrees that the bible is God's word and that it can be understood.

Perhaps you totally agree and have the highest regard and respect for the authority of God's word. We urge you to use it to validate what we have written as you read on.

02 - Myth 2: The Old Testament is Just as Binding as the New Testament

CHAPTER 2 MYTH 2: THE OLD TESTAMENT IS JUST AS BINDING AS THE NEW TESTAMENT

02.01 - Why is This Important

2.1 WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

I expect that after reading this chapter many members of denominations will readily agree and affirm that they have always believed that we are under the New Testament today. However, I spent the first 18 years of my life in a denomination faithfully attending bible study and services where preaching was performed. For some reason there was never any emphasis on the difference between the testaments. We often hear of people picking up their bibles and opening it at random and reading a passage in a mystical attempt to obtain a communication with God. This chapter will provide a sound basis from which we can begin to organize our understanding of the bible to see what applies to us and what does not.

God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35): "Then Peter opened [his] mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." He requires the same thing of you and me that he required of Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses; namely that we be faithful and diligently seek after Him (Heb 11:6): "But without faith [it is] impossible to please [him]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and [that] he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

However, it should also be clear that the way in which this faith was sought after and demonstrated was considerably different for some than for others. It is obvious that God's law for us is not that we refrain from eating the forbidden fruit (as it was for Adam), or that we build an arc (as it was for Noah), or that we sacrifice our son (as it was for Abraham). We realize that not only are these things not commanded of us today, but if we were to teach them for God's law today, it would be sin. If some church leader today were to insist that the congregation undertake the task of building a huge ship in preparation for a flood, we would question his sanity. The reasoning in the paragraph above is common sense. However, as this chapter unfolds we will see that such sense was (and is) not always held in common. The major point that we are trying to make is that just because something was commanded by God at one time does not make it a command for us today. While this is generally understood with regard to Adam, Noah and Abraham, the differences between the Old and New Testaments are not very well understood.

We will see that when men practiced and attempted to bind a part of God's law that no longer applied, this was considered to be sin. It was not an act of faith, nor was it diligently seeking after God. Thus, it was impossible for those who practice(d) such things to be pleasing to God (Heb 11:6 quoted above). In 1Ti 2:15 we read: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." The command to rightly divide or handle the word of truth correctly infers that it can be wrongfully handled. This would include misquoting, misapplying, taking scriptures out of context and applying commands to ourselves which God does not intend for us to apply (such as taking it upon ourselves to build an arc today).

Thus, we can no more pick and choose what it is that we want to accept out of the bible than we can discard it altogether. The picking and choosing is, in fact, both adding to and taking away from God's word, both of which are definitively condemned (Rev 22:18-19): "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and [from] the things which are written in this book." In this chapter we will see that it has not been left to us to determine that part of God's word which applies to us today -- the bible clearly indicates what applies and what does not. In addition, we will further validate that to go beyond that which applies to us is sin.

02.02 - Are We Under the New Testament

2.2 WE ARE UNDER THE NEW TESTAMENT

We recognize that many in the denominations believe this. However, the degree to which they go to the Old Testament to authorize some current-day practices convinces us that many do not fully understand this rightful division of the word of God. This was a very serious problem within the church in the first century. It seemed to arise in almost every church, mainly because of the influence of Jewish converts. We will divide our presentation into three categories: (1) Jesus' teachings in the gospels, (2) inspired apostolic examples throughout the book of Acts, and (3) the teachings of the Holy Spirit through the writings of the apostles. Once this is complete we will demonstrate that the Old Testament is totally true and that it serves an essential purpose for us today.

2.2.1 THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Jesus lived under the Old Testament law. As we shall see, this was essential, since He had to obey the Old Testament law in every possible way in order for it to be taken out of the way for us. He totally fulfilled it for us so that God's justice can still prevail despite the fact that we have not obeyed it. All of this will be proven scripturally as this chapter unfolds. The paragraph above is to enable us to understand the reasons that Jesus did not teach that the Old Testament was done away prior to His crucifixion. It is essential that we understand that certain information could not be understood, and therefore it was not fully revealed until after the Holy Spirit was sent to inspire the first century apostles and prophets. This occurred after Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

Consider the message of the transfiguration as recorded in Mark 9:2-9:

"And after six days Jesus taketh [with him] Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves. And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead."

Moses and Elias represent the Old Testament law and the prophets. Jesus recognized that the message of the transfiguration (that Jesus' words would take precedence over the Old Testament) could not be fully understood until after His resurrection. This appears to be the reason that he charged them to tell no one about it until then. As a Jew, Jesus lived under the Old Testament law. As one who had faith in His heavenly father, He obeyed the law that was in effect -- the Old

Testament law. Most of His interactions were with other Jews who were similarly under the Old Testament law. So, generally throughout the life of Christ (i.e., the gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), we find Jesus encouraging his fellow Jews to keep the law under which they lived. For example (Mat 23:1-3): "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, [that] observe and do." However, Jesus alluded to a time when this would not be the case. For example, His very appearance on earth marked a dramatic change in the way that God would deal with man. This concept was not foreign to the Old Testament, but it was only revealed in prospect. Now it was becoming a reality. Thus, in Luk 10:23-24 it says in reference to Jesus: "And he turned him unto [his] disciples, and said privately, Blessed [are] the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen [them]; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard [them]." A second example is given in John 4:7-26, a lengthy reading which is commonly called the story of the woman at the well. Being both a woman and a Samaritan, she was quite surprised that Jesus would address her "for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (vs. 9). Jesus got her attention by revealing that He knew about her personal life, after which she quickly changed the subject to that of the doctrinal differences which existed between the Jews and the Samaritans (vs. 20): "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." It is clear that Jesus was not excluding Samaritans, as the portion of the Old Testament that the Jews were living under would have. Further, He indicates that the temple worship mandated by the Old Testament would no longer be in effect.

Jesus gave the most insightful instructions with regard to the revelation of the New Testament to His apostles the last night that He spent with them. The entire sequence of events and instructions is in John 13:1-38; John 14:1-31; John 15:1-27; John 16:1-33. In John 14:25, Jesus indicated that He had initiated a new revelation which would continue with them: "These things have I spoken unto you, being [yet] present with you. But the Comforter, [which is] the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." This clearly indicates that the Old Testament would (and will) no longer suffice. It is important to realize that this statement is made to the apostles (minus Judas Iscariot); it should be clear that all Christians do not have the capacity to remember "whatsoever I [Jesus] have said unto you." As we proceed to review the book of Acts and the epistles we shall see that it was through the apostles that the New Testament was revealed. This is further affirmed by Jesus in John 15:26-27: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, [even] the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning." Interestingly, being "with me [Jesus] from the beginning" was the primary qualification for the apostle who took the place of Judas Iscariot (see Acts 1:21-22). Thus, to be a witness in this sense, one had to be an eye witness. However, these eye witnesses would also be endowed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to assure that their human memory limitations would not get in the way. There is also an inference that in due time additional information would be required (e.g., to assist with the work and organization of the church).

Now keep reading into the 16th chapter as Jesus continues (John 16:1-3): "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me." Clearly, if Christians were to be expelled from the synagogue, there is no way that they could obey the Old Testament law. The prophecy that the killing of Christians would be viewed (by the Jews) as service to God was fulfilled (at least in part) by Saul of Tarsus prior to his conversion and becoming the apostle Paul.

Without the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus the gospel could not become reality, and the full truth of God's justice, righteousness and mercy toward man could not be told. Jesus put it this way (John 16:7-11): "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged."

Jesus went on in the next few verses to indicate that they needed to observe the events which were about to transpire in order to fully understand the essence of the gospel (John 16:12-13): "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, [that] shall he speak: and he will show you things to come." In addition, there would be a clarification -- the general terms, or proverbs, in which he spoke to them would be specifically detailed (John 16:25-28): "These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father." When Jesus' disciples argued with him about this, he indicated that they were just too weak at this point to fully understand. Continuing our reading (John 16:29-33): "His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: but this we believe that thou camest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." The arguments presented above do not definitively prove that the Old Testament was set aside as the standard of authority under which we live today. However, they do provide a firm basis by which we can understand the history revealed in the book of Acts and the epistles with regard to this subject. These are considered in the next two subsections.

2.2.2 THE APPROVED EXAMPLES OF THE BOOK OF ACTS The book of Acts (Acts of the Apostles) provides the record of the historic fulfillment of the promises that Jesus made to His apostles. By seeing how these were fulfilled we can understand which part of God's word applies directly to us today. The book of Acts begins after the resurrection of Jesus, when He "showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). The first chapter covers his

ascension into heaven and the replacement of Judas Iscariot. The events of Acts 2:1-47 occurred on the first Pentecost after the resurrection, which would be about 50 days after the resurrection, and thus 10 days after the ascension. The Holy Spirit was poured out onto the apostles at this time, and Peter preached the first sermon inspired by the Holy Spirit. While this sermon did not specifically indicate that the Old Testament law had been set aside, it did indicate that there was a new way that men were to become acceptable to God, and that was through the blood of Jesus (Acts 2:37-42). (We will return to a more detailed discussion of Acts 2:1-47 when we discuss baptism under Myth 4.)

Despite the fact that there were men from a wide diversity of nations present for the Jewish celebration of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47), at this point the gospel was only preached to Jews, and the newly-formed church was localized to Jerusalem. Chapter 3 presents the story of a man healed by Peter and John, and their taking advantage of this occasion as an opportunity to further preach the gospel. However, in Chapter 4 we find the first persecution of the church was initiated by the very ones to whom the gospel was first directed -- the Jews.

Acts chapters 4 and 5 continue to demonstrate this persecution, while Chapter 6 gets into their concentration upon a single individual: Stephen. Chapter 7 is a very interesting chapter from the point of view of the topic of this chapter. It clearly demonstrates that it was not the position of the apostles or first-century prophets that the Old Testament was in any way erroneous. Great pains are taken throughout this chapter to document the fact that Stephen believed every word of the Old Testament. However, before he could show how the Old Testament led logically to our being under a new covenant after the death of Christ, he was brutally murdered by the Jews to whom he was preaching. This led to a general persecution of the church and, as a result, most of the Christians were scattered (Acts 8:4): "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." This led to the conversion of many Samaritans, who were a type of half-breed race that were not considered by the Jews to be in the general classification of gentiles. Acts 8:1-40 also records the conversion of an Ethiopian Jewish proselyte with the help of Philip (one of the Christians scattered from Jerusalem). This was one of the first (if not the first) black persons converted to Christ, further fulfilling the "all the nations" clause of the Great Commission (Mat 28:19). The character Saul is introduced in Acts 7:58 and Acts 8:1 in connection with his contribution to the death of Stephen. His conversion is detailed in Acts 9:1-43, and he will henceforth be called Paul -- the apostle Paul. Recognize that considerable time could have passed in this chapter as attention is given to the miracles performed by the apostle Peter in the latter part of chapter 9.

Acts 10:1-48 is a very significant event with regard to our subject -- the conversion of Cornelius' household, who were the first gentiles converted to Christ. If the Old Testament were still binding, the apostle Peter would have great difficulty in visiting one of another nation (Acts 10:28): "And he [Peter] said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." However, God sent several visions to convince Peter that no person was to be considered lower than another. The racial significance of the differences between the Old and New Testaments are quite important, and they explain the reason that this issue presented such difficulty for the church in the first century. The Old Testament was very adamant that God wanted His chosen people to be separate from other nations. The only way for those of

other nations to be in any way accepted by the Jews was for them to become proselytes to the Jewish Nation and religion, which were practically one and the same. As we continue, we will cite a number of Old Testament prophecies which indicated that this practice (attitude) was to cease. However, at this point, this was not generally understood by many of the Jews who had been converted to Christ. Acts 10:34-35 summarizes Peter's conclusion with regard to racial and national qualifications: "Then Peter opened [his] mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."

Peter had brought some of the skeptical Jewish Christians with him from Jerusalem, and the 11th chapter of Acts is largely devoted to documenting the fact that gentiles were converted directly to Christ without first becoming Jewish proselytes (which would have required that the males be circumcised). Acts 11:25-26 also ties up a loose end with regard to the apostle Paul: "Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."

Herod's murder of the apostle James (the brother of John) is described in Acts chapter 12. After this, attention returns to Antioch -- the church which would be the major center for sending preachers to the gentile world. Paul and Barnabas were sent out specifically to gentile areas of the world from Antioch, although they generally initiated their work by preaching at the synagogues first. When rejected and then persecuted by their fellow Jews (with some notable individual exceptions), they turned to the gentiles. Acts 13:1-52 and 14 describe what is usually called Paul's first missionary journey. This brings us to the first major passage which deals specifically with our subject: Acts 15:1-41. While we will quote some of the most salient passages from this text, we urge the reader to review the entire chapter before proceeding. The stage is set by Paul returning to Antioch after his first missionary journey and continuing to work with the Christians there. While he was there (Acts 15:1): "... certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, [and said], Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." This certainly was a primary edict of the Old Testament law, and if Christians were under this law (i.e., if the Old Testament were binding on them), then this would certainly be something which should be taught and practiced.

However, this was not the case, and the apostle Paul through inspiration of the Holy Spirit knew that this was false doctrine. All throughout Acts 13:1-52 and Acts 14:1-28 (i.e., the first missionary journey) he had taught otherwise. The word therefore in verse 2 indicates that the reader would expect Paul to have a problem with these brethren trying to bind something which God had loosed at the cost of the death of His dear son. Acts 15:2: "When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question."

Many believe and teach that it was necessary for this issue to be resolved by a "church council." This terminology is foreign to the bible. Paul was directly inspired by the Holy Spirit and needed no church council to tell him what was right or wrong. Notice the next few verses (Acts 15:3-4): "And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they

were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and [of] the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them." Indeed, if anything, Paul was going to Jerusalem to set them straight. In reality, however, it was to dispel the lie told by the false, i.e., that they were authorized by the apostles in Jerusalem. As we continue reading, we see this (Acts 15:5): "But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command [them] to keep the law of Moses." Here was the crux of the matter. Circumcision was just a marker for the entire law of Moses. There was nothing wrong with these individuals practicing these Old Testament teachings as they felt appropriate. But it was completely wrong for them to bind them on other Christians; and it still is today.

Following this, the apostles and elders gathered together with regard to this matter and, weighing the evidence presented by Peter (recall Acts 10:1-48; Acts 11:1-30), Paul, and finally James quoting from the Old Testament (Acts 15:13-17): "And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men [and] brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon [Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things." The Old Testament reference is from Amos 9:11-12.

It is quite significant that even in the time when the New Testament was in the process of being revealed and written, the value of the written Old Testament scriptures in validating doctrine was never questioned. If, in fact, the doctrines of the New Testament were not totally consistent with those of the Old Testament, then there would be just cause to doubt them. The fact that the Old Testament was no longer binding did not mean that it was any less true, any more than the fact that God does not now want us to build arcs invalidates the story of Noah. The resolution of the matter was totally consistent with the doctrine originally taught by both Paul and Peter; to review Peter's words (Acts 10:34-35): "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." While I hope that most of the readers can readily accept this, it was not an easy pill to swallow in the first century. From the racial divisions that exist in most religious organizations today, we should readily understand the reason that this is true. As we continue we will see that Christians are to recognize no racial distinctions as they "go into all of the world." All of the world begins within our own communities. This theme continues throughout the book of Acts as we follow the remainder of Paul's journeys. However, we will terminate this line of thought and leave it to the reader to study through the rest of the book of Acts with this in mind. There is tremendous evidence that we are no longer bound by the Old Testament law in the epistles, so it is advantageous that we move on to that phase of our proof.

2.2.3 THE TEACHINGS OF THE EPISTLES

The epistles were written by the inspired apostles (Paul, Peter and John) and one by a prophet (James). Generally they were written to the church that existed in a particular city (Rome, Corinth, etc.) or area. In some cases they were written to individual Christians (Timothy, Titus, Philemon), and sometimes to

Christians in general. One was written to an entire nation (Hebrews). In all cases these writings have the full weight of the authority of Jesus, as we showed in Chapter 1 (e.g., 1Co 14:37).

It is important to recognize that the early churches which were established by the preaching of the word (see Acts 13:1-52; Acts 14:1-28) were made up of men and women just like you and me. We all have our weaknesses. Even those churches today which are in fellowship with the Lord will have problems as these churches did. It is not our job to determine who is and who is not in fellowship with the Lord -- and this is not our intent. However, we know that the churches at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, etc. which had inspired letters written to them were indeed considered to be in fellowship with the Lord even though it is clear that certain of their members were in error.

Recognize that our intent, and the intent of this chapter, is to dispel the myth that we are still bound by the Old Testament law. We do not have the space to cover all of the New Testament teaching which deals with this subject. However, the ones that we will cover will compel anyone who believes the New Testament to understand what the inspired writers wanted their readers to comprehend. The subsections below will be ordered according to the epistles from which the scriptural proof is taken.

2.2.3.1 ROMANS

It is difficult to know where to start. The subject starts in Rom 2:17 and really continues through chapter 11. We will try to pick out some of the most definitive arguments.

First recognize that Paul sometimes uses the term circumcision to refer to the entire Law of Moses under which the Jews lived prior to Jesus' death on the cross. At other times he uses it to refer to the binding of this particular article of the Old Testament. For example, in Rom 2:25-29: "For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither [is that] circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he [is] a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision [is that] of the heart, in the spirit, [and] not in the letter; whose praise [is] not of men, but of God." The law referenced above is the Law of Moses by which the Jews were attempting to gain salvation. This is important in understanding what Paul was attempting to communicate with them over the next several chapters. For example, picking up the reading in Rom 3:19-26:

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law [is] the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God [which is] by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth [to be] a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, [I say], at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

Paul asserts that the "righteousness of God without the law [of Moses] is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." Thus, there is absolutely no inconsistency between the Old and New Testaments. However, it is clear from what Paul states here that we are not under the Old Testament law: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." Any attempt to gain salvation thereby is vain. Indeed, if we could be saved by the Old Testament law, then there would be no reason for Christ to have died on the cross.

Paul's argumentation along this line continues through Chapter 11. We urge you to read it in its entirety. The following typifies the doctrine which the Holy Spirit was inspiring the apostle Paul to write to the Christians at Rome (Rom 10:1): "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ [is] the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Paul's assertion here is that a zeal for God is not enough -- it must be according to the knowledge that "Christ is the end of the law." Since Jesus fulfilled it for us, our attempts to satisfy God by obedience to the Old Testament law is an appeal to our own sense of righteousness, not that of God.

2.2.3.2 GALATIANS The confusion between Old and New Testaments was the major reason for Paul writing to the churches of Galatia. He expressed his concern early in the letter (Gal 1:6-9): "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any [man] preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

Paul could have been talking about any perversion of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The remainder of chapter 1 and chapter 2 were dedicated to validating Paul's authority as an apostle. (This was essential if the letter were to be believed as being authoritative). However, once he completed this, he returns to the specific perversion which had motivated him to write the verses given above (Gal 3:1-5):

"O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if [it be] yet in vain. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, [doeth he it] by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

It is clear that there were some Jewish converts who were attempting to get their fellow Christians to return to the practices of the Old Testament.

Paul's argumentation along this line continues through chapters 3 and 4. Along the way he dealt with the question of the role that the law played: "Wherefore then [serveth] the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal 3:19). Thus, the provisions of the law would be removed once "the seed should come." The seed, of course, was Christ (Gal 3:16): "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith

not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

Paul uses the word faith to refer to the entire system of faith in Christ Jesus, i.e., the gospel of Jesus Christ. Again discussing the duration of the Old Testament law (Gal 3:23-29):

"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster [to bring us] unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye [be] Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Once again, see how tightly coupled the cessation of binding of the Old Testament law is to the entry into the church of all races, nations, or any other division between Christians.

Some of the most definitive verses which condemn the regression to the Old Testament are in Gal 5:2-12:

"Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion [cometh] not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be. And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased. I would they were even cut off which trouble you."

Consider the following with regard to this most definitive set of verses:

1. Paul was not teaching against circumcision per se (see 1Co 7:18-19); he was teaching against the binding of circumcision by those who wanted to force all Christians to observe the Old Testament (recall Acts 15:1-41).
2. Apparently they were just starting at circumcision and acting like they were not going to bind anything else. However, from Acts 15:5, it was clear that they had in mind to bind the entire law of Moses.
3. Paul makes it clear that consistency demands that you cannot pick and choose what you want even from that which was once bound on God's people. No practice within the Old Testament was wrong in and of itself, and therefore men are still free to practice those things as individual traditions. However, when they bind them on their fellow Christians they fall under some of the harshest condemnation pronounced in the New Testament.
4. Those who would go back under an inferior law have made the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross a valueless act: "Christ is become of no effect unto you."

5. Those who believe that it is impossible to fall from grace must make an exception here, since Paul said: "ye are fallen from grace." This certainly shows the condemnation of those who would legislate for God.

6. "I would they were even cut off which trouble you" is a rather mild way of translating the underlying Greek text. Literally it means that Paul wished that they would mutilate themselves. Some interpret it "go beyond circumcision." This could have a wide variety of meanings, and it is one of Paul's scriptures of which Peter may have said "are some things hard to be understood" (1Pe 3:1-22). The meaning could range from Paul's wish that the false teachers would totally expose their position by going beyond their binding of circumcision to bind the entire law; in this way they would not be so apt to deceive. The other extreme is that Paul actually wished them to literally, physically mutilate themselves -- which is unlikely.

Regardless of the interpretation of the last verse of this passage, the meaning is quite clear. The binding of any part of the Old Testament law upon Christians under the present dispensation violates God's will and causes the perpetrators to fall from grace.

2.2.3.3 COLOSSIANS The church at Colosse apparently had the same problem as those of Galatia. In the following passage of scripture the apostle Paul uses the term circumcision figuratively. Recognize that circumcision was that ritual which legally converted a male gentile to be recognized as a Jew. Similarly, the male Jewish child that was circumcised on the eighth day of his life was then recognized to have met the requirements which God had established for him to qualify as being a citizen of "God's chosen people." In addition, the removal of the foreskin was also considered to be a type of cleansing and separation from the rest of the world. With this in mind we can understand what Paul was trying to communicate in Col 2:8-15:

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with [him] through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; [And] having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." The substitution of the Old Testament law for Christ demeans the One in whom "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," who is the "head of all principality and power." The circumcision not made with hands that Christians are subject to is baptism. Baptism is that single act which puts the alien into Christ (Rom 6:3), which is analogous to circumcision putting the alien gentile into the Jewish nation. A second figure is employed by the apostle as he speaks of the law as being a "handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us." In fact, it could not save us without the life of Christ which fulfilled it; and once He fulfilled it He "took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." What more definitive terms could be used to indicate that it is no longer binding on us?

After this, Paul goes on to further illustrate some of the things under the Old Testament law that they were being deceived into observing as matters of faith (Col 2:16-23): "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath [days] ... why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh." The regression of Christians back to the Old Testament law reflected the wisdom of man, not the wisdom of God. God's wisdom is totally manifested in Christ and the fulfillment of the law. That which is fulfilled does not need to be fulfilled again.

2.2.3.4 HEBREWS

Those familiar with the New Testament might question why we did not start with this letter which has the differentiation of the Old and New Testaments as its major concern. We thought it best to demonstrate the breadth and clarity of the scriptural evidence before getting into this more abstract treatment. As its name implies, this letter was written to that part of the nation of the Jews who had been converted to Christ. They were the ones who had particular problem in recognizing that their traditional religious practices were no longer binding (despite their being allowed on an individual basis). Can you imagine changing all of your religious practices? Can you imagine the shock of those whose status and authority depended upon their position within the synagogue? While we often condemn the Jews for their inflexibility, perhaps we can sympathize with them in this regard. Indeed, Hebrews presents the same type of challenge to the denominations that the apostles presented to the Jews. We expect the very same reaction. From the very beginning of the letter to the Hebrews we find the writer emphasizing the superiority of the revelation which came through Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1-2): "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by [his] Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." The remainder of Chapter 1 is dedicated to demonstrating the extent to which Jesus, the son of God, was superior to all created beings, including those who were perceived to be the most exalted -- angels.

After demonstrating the superiority of the messenger, he concludes (Heb 2:1-4):

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let [them] slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard [him]; God also bearing [them] witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will?" The "word spoken through angels" is referring to the diverse revelations of the Old Testament. The Hebrews knew that under the Old Testament law "every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward" even with the inferior messengers. Now that God has spoken through His own son, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

Note further how this salvation was revealed. It was first spoken by the Lord himself when He was on this earth. The He sent the Holy Spirit to complete the revelation once the principles of the death, burial and resurrection could be fully understood historically. Recall our discussion of John

14:1-31 and 15 in Section 2.2.1. This revelation was confirmed by miracles to prove that it was, in fact, from God and not just a fabrication of some religious leader. The remainder of Chapter 2 shows how Jesus became a perfect sacrifice for our sins by the things which He suffered. Chapter 3 shows the superiority of the revelation of Christ over that of Moses (Heb 3:3): "For this [man] was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honor than the house." There is a clear statement here that to go back under the law as given by Moses will dishonor Christ. Chapter 3 goes on to give a stern warning that Christians can fall just as those of Moses' time fell.

Note how this warning focuses on our faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, as we read in Heb 4:1-2: "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left [us] of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard [it]." The warning goes on through Chapter 4, which concludes with the following (Heb 4:14-16): "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast [our] profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as [we are, yet] without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." The assertion that Jesus is now our high priest is a major departure from the Old Testament. In fact, Jesus did not qualify to be a priest according to the law of Moses, since the priests had to be from the tribe of Levi and Jesus was from the tribe of Judah. This is a major point that the Hebrews writer deals with next. The difference between those high priests taken from among men and the Son of God is the subject of Chapter 5, where the Hebrews writer introduces the legal precedent by which Jesus could be a high priest. The precedent goes back before the law of Moses to a priest who served Abraham. His name was Melchizedek. Speaking of Jesus, the Hebrews writer states (Heb 5:8-10): "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek." Question: who did Jesus become the author of eternal salvation to? Was it to those who obey Moses or the prophets? or was it to "all them that obey" Jesus? This appeal to a precedent demonstrates the great respect that the Hebrews writer had for the word of God as written in the Old Testament. The assertion that Jesus was now our High Priest would seem to be reasonable and acceptable to Christians. But the writer is trying to show to those who were attempting to impose that Old Testament that it was that very document that provided the evidence that were are no longer to be subject to it. Please keep this in mind as we continue our summary of this wonderful letter.

If this argumentation seems tedious, the Hebrews writer anticipated at this point that it would be to many. He chastises them for becoming dull of hearing and for not taking their rightful position as teachers, since they had certainly been Christians long enough to have mastered these truths. But instead, they did not even understand the milk of the word. He goes on in the remainder of Chapter 6 and into Chapter 7 to further explain these concepts. He concludes Chapter 7 with the following (Heb 7:26-28): "For such an high priest became us, [who is] holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the

word of the oath, which was since the law, [maketh] the Son, who is consecrated for evermore." In Section 2.2.1, we introduced the concept above that Jesus could not reveal all of the truth while still on this earth. Certain things had to be accomplished by his death, burial, resurrection and ascension into heaven. This is confirmed by the Hebrews writer in Heb 8:4-7: "For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, [that] thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount." The principle here is quite clear -- when God gives us a pattern we have no choice but to follow it until that point when God sets it aside. Even Jesus himself could not assume the role of High Priest as long as the Old Testament law was in effect. As we saw above in our discussion of Col 2:8-15, it was His death on the cross that also caused the "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." The Hebrews writer further explains how a better covenant supersedes the Old Testament laws (Heb 8:6-7): "But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first [covenant] had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second." He continues to explain that the fault was not with the covenant but with those who would not follow it. The he quotes another Old Testament passage which clearly states that a New Covenant, or New Testament, would be established: Jer 31:31-34. Finally he states it in absolutely no uncertain terms (Heb 8:13): "In that he saith, A new [covenant], he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old [is] ready to vanish away." Remnants of Old Testament worship was still being maintained by the Jews in the first century. However, with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the temple was destroyed and never rebuilt, making total compliance with the Old Testament impossible.

Lest we think that the Hebrews writer is not talking about worship under the Law of Moses, Chapter 9 is dedicated to a detailed description of exactly what he meant. Each Old Testament detail is described as a part of the shadow that has now become reality in the revelation of the gospel of Christ. Note that often we speak of the New Testament as being more spiritually oriented and the Old Testament being more of an appeal to the physical aspects of man. This is true, and it demonstrates that the physical aspects of this life are the shadows -- the dark projections from objects that block the light. Reality is revealed by viewing these objects in the light of the New Testament.

Chapters 9 and 10 present a detailed contrast between the priesthood of Christ and the Old Testament law. Integrated into this is a detailed interpretation of Jer 31:31-34. The eleventh chapter provides a clear definition of exactly what the bible means when it uses the word faith. It also clearly demonstrates that God has always required the same type of faith from all men and women of all times. The only thing that has changed is the particular law that we are under. This rather large section of the chapter has provided but a small sample of the evidence within the bible which demonstrates that today we are under the New Testament. The next section will show, however, that the Old Testament is still essential to understanding the New Testament. A final section presents the reasons that all of this is important.

02.03 - The Truthfulness and Value of the Old Testament

2.3 THE TRUTHFULNESS AND VALUE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

There is absolutely not one verse in the New Testament that indicates that the Old Testament is not totally true, or that it should not be believed today. Recall again where Jesus said "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Mat 5:17-18). Jesus believed in the validity of the Old Testament, and so should we. Does this sound strange? Can we believe something to be true without believing that we are subject to it? Of course! We believe that Adam was told not to eat of the forbidden fruit, but we are not under that law. We understand that Noah was commanded to build an arc, but we do not build arcs today. God requires the same faith of us as he did of them (Heb 11:1-40), but today our faith is revealed by obedience to His son. Of what value is the Old Testament? First and foremost, it is important because it is essential to our understanding of the New Testament. The Old Testament is quoted throughout the New Testament to explain the full meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Without an understanding of the Old Testament, these New Testament passages are meaningless; thus we cannot understand all of the New Testament unless we have some basic understanding of the Old Testament. This makes this understanding of and faith in the validity of the Old Testament essential to our salvation today. Christians must dedicate themselves to a study and understanding of the Old Testament -- not because it is God's law for us today, but to understand God's law for us today, i.e., the New Testament. [In case you feel uncomfortable about calling the New Testament God's law for us today, read 1Co 9:21, where Paul said that he was "not without law to God, but under the law to Christ."] A second reason that the Old Testament is important is that it contains timeless knowledge with regard to the nature of both God and man. How can we understand suffering without the book of Job? How can we sing songs of praise to God without the book of Psalms? How can we obtain the wisdom of the wisest man whoever lived without the book of Ecclesiastes? How can we know where we came from without the book of Genesis? We could go on and on, but Jesus said it best when he said: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Mat 4:4). Every word includes the Old Testament.

Finally, we know that the Old Testament is a priceless treasure because the New Testament tells us that it is. In Rom 15:2-4 we read: "Let every one of us please [his] neighbor for [his] good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." First, Paul quoted an Old Testament scripture (Psa 69:9) as proof that Christ pleased not himself. Then he stated the value of the Old Testament scriptures ("things ... written aforetime"). They are for our learning that we might have hope through patience and comfort of the scriptures. As a second example, consider the writing of the apostle Paul in 1Co 10:1-33. This is a very powerful chapter that many people do not wish to hear. It states unequivocally that Christians (which implies that

they are in a saved, covenant relationship with God) can be lost just as the Israelites who were saved (out of Egypt) fell from God's grace. After describing what happened to them in great detail, he stated (1Co 10:11-12): "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." The Old Testament was written for our admonition. Remember, God is no respecter of persons. We can clearly and graphically see that those of old were clearly condemned for their disobedience. Do you think that we are better than they? On the contrary, "how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Heb 2:3). So the Old Testament should be believed because it is the truth revealed of God. Faith in its validation will lead us to conclude that we are not under its edicts today; with the death of Christ we are under the New Testament. However, the value of the Old Testament is in enabling us to understand the New Testament, helping us understand the nature of God, helping us to have comfort in hope, and admonishing us to be faithful.

02.04 - Importance Revisited

2.4 WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Let us apply what we have learned immediately above to answer this question. In Num 13:1-33 we read about Moses sending spies into the land of Canaan to spy out the land. It was God's will that they bring back a positive report and have faith in Him to take the land. However, we read that all but Joshua and Caleb brought back a report which demonstrated a lack of faith in God. God was extremely displeased with them and we read in Num 14:1-45 how he condemned them to spend 40 years in the wilderness, and that none of the unfaithful would cross over into the promised land. Toward the end of Chapter 14 we read about these men repenting themselves and deciding indeed to attempt to take the promised land. It says (Num 14:44: "But they presumed to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, departed not out of the camp. Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, [even] unto Hormah."

Timing is everything. Had they demonstrated that zeal a few days before they would have been blessed by God. These things are written for our admonition ...

Consider a second example. It is recorded in Exo 17:6 where Moses was commanded of god: "Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel." However, a later occasion is recorded in Num 20:10-12: "And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts [also]. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them."

Timing is everything. Moses could have argued that God had previously commanded him to strike the rock. What was wrong with that now? Moses could have, but he had more sense than to do such a foolish thing. Moses and Aaron both knew what they had done wrong -- they had not trusted God.

Today when we practice and bind the Old Testament rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ, it demonstrates that very same lack of faith in God. Is it important? Ask Moses.

03 - Myth 3: We Are Saved by Faith Only

CHAPTER 3 MYTH 3: WE ARE SAVED BY FAITH ONLY

03.01 - Why is This Important?

3.1 WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

There is no subject more important than our salvation. There is only one reality with God: either we are saved by faith only or we are not. If we are saved by faith only, then it ought to say it in the New Testament (i.e., the covenant under which we now live -- see Chapter 2). On the other hand, if the word of God indicates that this is a false doctrine, but we decide to believe it anyway, we will be eternally lost. That the denominations generally teach that a person is saved by faith only is a documented fact. It is a remnant of Calvinism which denominational leaders feared to challenge. In fact, at least since the 1950's the trend has been to make this a central tenet of the ecumenical movement. The reason for this seems quite clear from an historical point of view. While denominational churches were relatively independent with each member practicing religion through the local congregation, each could teach its own variation of the conditions of salvation. Of course, some of these were much closer to the bible pattern than others. However, in the late 1940's and early 1950's large interdenominational revival meetings began to develop. Radio and TV evangelists began to emerge, the largest and most successful being Billy Graham. The ecumenical plea -- to unify the denominations under some common denominator -- was embraced by the practitioner in the pew, and the clergy saw little reason to object. After all, these inter-denominational teachers never dealt with any controversial doctrinal issues, and they always encouraged their converts to return to their home church, or else to go to the "church of your choice." It seemed like an ideal marriage.

Unfortunately, the only common denominator was the lowest common denominator. The radio and TV preachers could hardly specify any real biblical condition without offending someone. Yet, they could not just return everyone to their home church without saying something about salvation. So they told people that if they "just believed" in Jesus Christ they would be saved. The exact definition of "just believing" was left to each person to interpret as s/he saw fit. This offended no one except those who were committed to the concept of a single reality, a single truth (John 8:32). However, this was such a small minority that they could be ignored. The terminology used often varied. Probably the way that it is most often stated now is "accept Jesus as your personal savior" and you will be saved. However, in all cases there was (and still is) absolutely no outward action required. In fact, often even the suggestion of a scriptural condition of salvation was militantly taught to be sinful, becoming one of the very few points of doctrine which was contentiously defended by denominationalists. Most often new converts are urged to pray for forgiveness and acceptance, but rarely is this stated to be a condition of salvation. This is not saying that salvation by faith only was of recent origin. Indeed, we can see its roots in many false teachings that are identified in the New Testament (and we plan to deal with these in this chapter). However, we are presenting what we believe to be the obvious reason that the mass-media preachers do not align themselves with clear biblical teachings as to the conditions of salvation. It would quickly diminish their large numbers, and it would put them at odds with the local congregations which teach a variety of rituals and doctrines as part of their religious practice.

Let us begin our study of this interesting topic by defining our terms. This subject is particularly fraught with potential semantical arguments, and if the differences here were purely semantic we would be extremely pleased. Our purpose in defining what we mean by faith only is to enable us to communicate effectively about the subject. Once these definitions are established we will deal with the scriptural reasons that one should never teach anyone to be saved by faith only. At that point we will proceed to consider exactly what the bible does state about the doctrine of faith only in Section 3.4. We will then present what the bible means when it teaches that we are saved "by faith." In Section 3.6 we will present what the bible teaches the conditions of salvation are -- how we get into a saved condition, and how we keep ourselves in that condition.

03.02 - Definitions

3.2 DEFINITIONS

It is of paramount importance that we define our terms because they often mean different things to different people. The proposition that we are evaluating is that we are saved by faith only.

"We" means those of us who are currently alive, and thus, as we saw in the Chapter 2, living under the New Testament, often called the gospel of Christ. The word saved is referring to being rescued from the consequences of our sins. All have sinned (Rom 3:23); therefore, all are in need of salvation. In addition, when people are saved, they enter into a different relationship with God. This is often referenced in the New Testament as being "written in the Lamb's book of life" (Php 4:3; Rev 3:5; Rev 13:8; Rev 20:15; Rev 21:27; Rev 22:19). In question in this chapter is the definition of those conditions which must be satisfied for a person to be transformed from the condition of being lost to the condition of being in fellowship with God. The term faith only must be defined collectively. It will be defined in detail later in the chapter. However, our intent now is to present the perception of the meaning of this term when faith is taught as the sole condition of salvation. Since the bible does not teach salvation by faith only, it has no scriptural definition when used in this way. Since its usage as a condition of salvation is not unique, it can (and does) have a very wide range of meanings. In fairness, its usage in Jas 2:1-26 is probably not the way that most denominational practitioners view the term, although this does provide the biblical definition of it. To be as accurate as possible, our observation of the current denominations, and our experience in a denomination for 18 years leads us to believe that the following is a reasonably acceptable definition of the term: The concept of faith only carries with it the idea that when an alien sinner totally believes and puts his/her faith in Jesus Christ and accepts Him as his/her personal savior, it is at this point in time that the person's name is added to the Lamb's book of life, and absolutely no other actions are required in order for the believer to receive forgiveness of sins and to enter into a covenant relationship with God. The word only means that absolutely no action other than faith is necessary to bring about salvation.

03.03 - Why Not Faith Only?

3.3 WHY NOT FAITH ONLY? The bible clearly teaches that we are saved by faith. Indeed, we have already given many scriptural references that teach this, and we will deal with this further in the next section. The question is: Can we therefore conclude that we are saved by faith only? In reality, the bible teaches that there are many things by which we are saved. Consider the following:

1. We are saved by grace (Eph 2:8): "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God." Are we saved by grace only?

2. We are saved by hope (Rom 8:24-25): "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, [then] do we with patience wait for [it]." Are we saved by hope only?

3. We are saved by faith (John 3:16): "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." Are we saved by faith only?

4. We are saved by repentance (2Co 7:10): "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." Or, note Luk 13:3 where Jesus put it in a negative light: "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Are we saved by repentance only?

5. We are saved by calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21): "And it shall come to pass, [that] whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (See also Rom 10:13.) Are we saved by calling on the name of the Lord only?

6. We are saved by faith and confession (Rom 10:9): "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Can we be saved by faith if we refuse to confess? Can we be saved by confession if we do not believe?

7. We are saved by faith and baptism (Mark 16:16): "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Can we be saved by faith if we refuse to be baptized? Can we be saved by baptism if we fail to believe?

8. We are saved by baptism (1Pe 3:21): "The like figure whereunto [even] baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Are we saved by baptism only?

9. We are saved by acts of obedience (Php 2:12-13): "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of [his]

good pleasure." And (Heb 5:9): "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." Are we saved by acts of obedience only?

10. We are saved by enduring to the end (Mat 24:13): "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Are we saved by enduring to the end only? This is not an exhaustive list, but it enables us to demonstrate some things about the doctrine of faith only.

First, since the list above clearly shows that we are saved by a number of different things, we can confidently affirm that we are not saved by anything only. The doctrine of faith only (or anything else only) trivializes the word of God. "Man cannot live by bread alone, but by every word the proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Mat 4:4). To write off the entire New Testament by condensing it into one verse has got to be wrong. [While we applaud the zeal of those who hold up large signs of bible verses at nationally broadcast football games, the bible should not be so trivialized. There is no single verse that can adequately sum it up to the exclusion of the rest.] The reason that it has been condensed is to make a palatable appeal to the masses. As we discussed above, radio and TV quick-salvation presentations just would not allow for a detailed discussion of the complete word of God. So the leaders present it in an easy, simple, understandable -- and wrong -- summary.

We have arranged the ten items above roughly in the amount of effort which is demanded of the believer. Please reread the scriptures from above again to assure that this is, in fact, the teaching of the New Testament. Then consider the following thoughts:

1. We are saved by grace. Grace is the unmerited favor of God. What God has done for us in sending His son to die on the cross for our sins it totally without merit on our part (Rom 5:6-11). If we are to be saved by something only, why not make it grace only? This is the belief of the universalists who do not believe God will condemn anyone. It was also a major tenet of Calvinism that we are saved by the "irresistible grace of God" and that there is nothing that we have to do with it one way or the other. We will not discuss this further, for it makes our very being and existence meaningless. If there is anything that the bible teaches it is that each person has a free will and will be held accountable for his behavior, not the behavior of God. However, the same argumentation that extrapolates valid scripture to make faith into faith only, can also be applied to make grace into grace only, or mercy into mercy only, or any of the other conditions into that condition only.

2. We are saved by hope. While grace is totally independent of anything that man has done or will do, hope requires something of man. Hope is desire plus expectation. In this case it is the desire to be in a covenant relationship with God now and forever. The now part is totally within the control of a person to be grasped immediately by meeting the conditions of salvation. The forever part, however, is not yet a recognized reality (seen), and thus must be viewed with expectation. The desire for eternal life is within most normal people; the expectation is not. We are saved by hope in the sense that it is this hope for the realization of eternal life in the hereafter that motivates us to keep ourselves faithful to God.

3. We are saved by faith. This is absolutely not in question. The bible teaches in dozens of places that we are saved by faith. Recall how that faith is acquired (Rom 10:17): "So then faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." In the next section we will take up the question of

what the bible means when it teaches that we are saved by faith.

4. We are saved by repentance. As the quoted reference indicates, repentance is brought about by Godly sorrow for sin. Those who repent of their sins do not repeat those sins willfully. Repentance is the most difficult part of our part of salvation. It involves sorrow not only for the things done, but also for the things undone. It requires a complete change in life to be reoriented away from self and toward Christ. With this and the 2Co 7:10 definition in mind, think about this question: could there be any chance that man could be saved by repentance only? Or, more importantly, is repentance only even conceivable? Are there any circumstances under which it could possibly exist? We will see that the same reasoning applies to a living faith.

5. We are saved by calling on the name of the Lord. This is not in dispute; but what does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? Read Mat 7:21-23: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Thus, "calling on the name of the Lord" is more than asserting that what is being done is in His name. If, in fact, the actions so labeled are not by His authority, this assertion would bring reproach upon the name of the Lord. Much in religion today does just that. "Calling on the name of the Lord" means that the individual looks to Jesus for authority for all things. This is totally consistent with Mat 7:23: "he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

6. We are saved by faith and confession. (Note that "confession" here is not a confession of sins in the Roman Catholic sense; it is the truthful statement that the person making the confession believes that Jesus Christ is the son of God; see Mat 16:16). Rom 10:9 gives two conditions for salvation. We need to ask two questions: (1) is it possible to have faith without confessing Christ? and (2) is it possible to confess Christ without having faith? We will show below that the faith upon which salvation is conditioned cannot exist without this confession. On the other hand, item 5 above indicates that one can make the statement of belief for self-serving purposes and not out of true faith in Christ. As for the necessity of confessing Christ, see also Mat 10:32-33.

7. We are saved by faith and baptism. This multiple condition statement, given in Mark 16:16, can be evaluated in the same way as that given immediately above: (1) is it possible to have faith without being baptized into Christ? and (2) is it possible to be baptized into Christ without having faith? The answers are the same. However, we defer consideration on baptism to the next chapter.

8. We are saved by baptism. While we will see in the next chapter that the bible clearly teaches this in many passages in addition to 1Pe 3:21, it never teaches that a person is saved by baptism only. Of all of the acts that are commanded of us, baptism is the least demanding -- indeed, an argument can be made that it is something which is done to us, not something that we do. However, it is up to each of us to subject ourselves to it. Baptism is also the only command of God that we only obey once.

9. We are saved by acts of obedience. These are not works of our own creation. They must be the works of God. This premise is not arguable. We might argue over just what is required, but we

cannot argue that some act or acts of obedience are required (even if it is only faith). It is necessary for us to become familiar with the New Testament to determine just what these works are.

10. We are saved by enduring to the end. Clearly there is no quick and easy salvation solution given in the New Testament. If we do not equip ourselves with the strength that God supplies we will not even know what it means to endure, much less know how to meet the snares of the devil which are strategically positioned to assure our failure. Thus, Peter said (1Pe 5:8): "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle [you]. To him [be] glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

It should be clear that the doctrine of faith only is, at best, an oversimplification. In the next section we will show that faith only is defined by scripture. While we recognize that this is not the definition that is acceptable to denominational teachers, our question is this: why not use scriptural terms in scriptural ways? The answer, of course, has to do with deception.

03.04 - What the Bible Teaches About Faith Only

3.4 WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT FAITH ONLY The words faith and only come together only once in the bible. So that there will be absolutely no misunderstanding, we quote the entire context of that occurrence (Jas 2:14-26):

What [doth it] profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can that faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be [ye] warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what [doth it] profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent [them] out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Reread Jas 2:24 in your bible again: "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." Can it be wrong for us to teach that a man is not saved by faith only when, in fact, the bible does? Of course, it can be argued that this is not what is meant when denominational teachers use the term "faith only" today. However, the burden of proof is upon them to prove their doctrines from the New Testament. It is impossible for us to know for sure what they mean when they use this term, although we gave what we thought was their meaning above. Let us analyze Jas 2:14-26 first, in order to see that it is not contradictory of the other numerous bible teachings with regard to salvation by faith:

Jas 2:14 Apparently there were some who were saying that one could possess faith without demonstrating this faith by works. Either that, or they were, in fact, claiming to have faith while not demonstrating it with works. Is this not what those who teach salvation by faith only are not implying today? If not, why even use the term? Thus, the question is quite relevant: Can that faith save him?

Jas 2:15-17 The absurdity of this position is exposed by James. This is like telling a hungry person to be fed without feeding him. In Jas 2:17 James does not deny that such a faith can exist. However, this is not a living faith. It is a dead and ineffectual faith, and thus does not have the capacity to save. It is not the faith upon which salvation is conditioned in John 3:16.

Jas 2:18 James shows that it is impossible to reveal faith without some outward manifestation, i.e., works. This outward appearance of righteousness is the confession of Christ which is commanded of every Christian. It is impossible for a Christian to only be one inwardly -- if the inward faith is there, the works of obedience and righteousness will be impossible to hide.

[Let us pause right here to state our belief that this is the position of most denominational teachers. They are not against the practice of good works. Our question is: why don't they come out and teach this. Why keep it camouflaged under the umbrella of faith only?]

Jas 2:19 As an extreme example, James shows that the demons have a knowledge of God -- they believe, but this does not save them.

Jas 2:20-23 "Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness." This is also reviewed in Heb 11:8-12, Heb 11:17-19. Heb 11:1-40 is a clear definition of faith, which we will address in the next section. Notice, however, that every act of faith on Abraham's part was reflected in some outward work. Abraham never had faith only -- to him this would have been an absurd theological concept.

24 These works are not works of man's own devising, which can never have any impact upon salvation. Further, they do not merit his salvation even if they are in complete compliance with God's word. They justify the man because they proceed out of a living faith in the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse his sin. Any other type of faith is totally useless for anything but to deceive others.

25 James argues from the greatest (Abraham) to the least (Rahab). God is no respecter of persons -- the same type of faith is required of us all. Since James is talking to Christians under the New Testament, it most certainly applies to us.

26 This very interesting verse not only defines what faith without works is, it defines what physical death is: the body apart from the spirit. Of what use is the body apart from the spirit. We quickly embalm it and bury it before it decays. Even so a dead faith needs to be put as far away from us as possible.

What are you saved by? a living faith, or a dead faith?

03.05 - What it Means to be Saved by Faith

3.5 WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SAVED BY FAITH The bible clearly teaches that we are saved by faith. The passages that are usually used to prove the doctrine of faith only are those which prove that we are saved by faith. Since we saw above that we are not saved by faith only (or anything else only), the logical question follows: what does the New Testament mean when it says that we are saved by faith?

First and foremost, we saw that this was a living faith. Recognize that faith is an abstract term. It is purely a motivator of action. We can imagine that we have faith. We might convince ourselves that we have faith. But, since it is intangible, there is no way for us or them to tell apart from the actions which it motivates. The argumentation presented above totally supports these concepts. Since living faith will always be accompanied by some outward manifestation of the action which it motivates, James reasons that this is the way that we determine if we have faith (Jas 2:18): "... show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." In those cases where we are commanded to determine the faith of others the same rule holds (Mat 7:15-20): "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither [can] a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." The Hebrew writer added to this basic definition of faith in the eleventh chapter (Heb 11:1-2): "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report." While this is not the easiest of definitions, it can be understood in light of what we have already established from Jas 2:1-26. In particular, the things hoped for do not have substance, at least not for us at the current time (if they were seen they would not be hoped for -- recall Rom 8:24). The Hebrew writer states that faith is the substance of these things. It produces tangible accomplishments (substance) by which we can envision those things which do not yet exist for us (i.e., eternal life). This is "the evidence of things not seen."

Most people of the world think of faith as being a figment of the imagination of the religious -- pie in the sky, if you will -- that for which there is no evidence. This is not the least bit true. Recall the source of faith (Rom 10:17): "So then faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." As we saw in the previous chapter, the word of God was given first through the Lord and then through the apostles and prophets, and it was confirmed by miracles when it was delivered (Heb 2:3-4). Thus, it is not an invention of man, but a reliable communication from God. The only question is: do we allow it to generate faith in us? If we continue to hear and seek him, it will do just that. If we cut it off and do not diligently seek God, then it will not. Recall Heb 11:6: "But without faith [it is] impossible to please [him]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and [that] he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." The source of faith is the proven and confirmed word of God. The effect of faith is to provide substance of the things hoped for. How is this accomplished? the Hebrew writer answers this question in the only way possible: by giving examples. We will not

go through all of the examples, but we urge the reader to read the entire 11th chapter of Hebrews. It defines living faith more effectively than any other explanation could. In absolutely no case can we find anything which could in any way be described as faith only. In every single case faith materialized as "the evidence of things not seen." In every single case it led to obedience to God. The bible clearly teaches that we are saved by faith. But it is not faith defined by man, it is faith defined by God. Heb 11:1-40 defines the quality of faith which God expects of us today. As we see the word faith appearing in God's word, it is important that we do not interpret it to be the dead faith, or faith only. In many places it is used to refer to the entire plan of salvation (such as in John 3:16). Here, and most other places, faith does not mean dead faith (faith only), it means a living faith. Thus, it carries with it the confidence and desire to obey all of God's laws that apply to us today.

03.06 - What Then Are We Saved By?

3.6 WHAT THEN ARE WE SAVED BY?

We wish to close this chapter on a positive note. If we are not saved by faith only, then what are we saved by? Let's look at the positive side of Jesus' statement (Mat 7:21): "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Can anyone deny that we are saved by doing God's will? Dare they? If it is God's will that we are saved by doing nothing, then so be it! If it is God's will that we be saved by faith only, then so be it! On the other hand, if we must walk on burning glass and nails, then so be it! Our job at this point is to determine just what this is.

It is essential that we understand the two aspects of salvation: (1) what we must do to get into a covenant relationship with God, and (2) what we must do to keep ourselves saved. Confusing these two aspects of salvation prevents us from dealing with the subject intelligently. We recognize that one of the basic tenets of Calvinism was the security of the believer (or, as it is often stated "once saved always saved"). We will not address this, since it is so obviously contrary to scripture. (We urge any who hold to this belief to read any three pages of the New Testament in a row -- it is difficult to find three pages in a row in which this doctrine is not clearly contradicted. Indeed, we have already presented many scriptures above that contradict this doctrine, and many more will be presented in the remainder of this book.)

Since all have sinned (Rom 3:23), all are in need of salvation. Some people claim that they have no sin, but this is rare. Most people know that they have sinned and believe earnestly that they have met God's plan of salvation when, in fact, they have not. Let us take this one step at a time -- we will first address the subject of escaping the consequences of our sins and entering into a covenant relationship with God. Then in the final section we will address the issue of keeping ourselves saved.

03.06.01 - Entering Into a Covenant Relationship with God

3.6.1 ENTERING INTO A COVENANT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

We have established by the review of a number of scriptures that we are saved by faith -- but this is a qualified faith -- it must be a living faith. We have also seen how this type of faith is produced (Rom 10:17): "So then faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Hearing is the beginning of salvation, and it is the most critical step. If we are willing to hear and we continue to hear (listen to) God's word with a believing heart, we will be saved. If we refuse to hear, then no other acts on our part or on God's part can possibly save us.

Let us explore a logical arrangement of conditions which Jesus himself placed on salvation. The first condition would logically be to hear the word. Indeed, Jesus made hearing and learning the word of God a condition of coming to Him (John 6:44-45): "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." Note first that this is a condition: "No man can come to me, except ..." This fits logically into all that we learned about the value of God's word in bringing about our salvation.

Obviously we are not saved by hearing only (Rom 2:13; Jas 1:22). Those who have never heard would be in a better position than those who hear and refuse to act upon what they hear. Hearing produces faith, and faith is the next logical condition of salvation (John 3:16): "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Few people have any problem in accepting faith as a condition of salvation.

What does faith motivate us to do? What do we learn from hearing God's word? One of the first things is the recognition of our own sin. It would seem reasonable that this recognition of sin would bring about sorrow -- a sorrow that would further motivate us to turn from our sin. Repentance is a requirement, however, not because it is reasonable, but because Jesus made it a condition of salvation. In Luk 13:3 Jesus stated: "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Let's examine the context of this passage to be sure that this concise condition applies to us spiritually (and not just to them, possibly physically). The recorded incident begins in Luk 13:1: "There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

It seems clear that the people who came to Jesus at this time were ordinary people, just like you and me. They were not murderers, rapists, or obviously immoral. Like us, they brought up incidents which would show them in the best possible light. The implication was that these were pointing their fingers at obvious sinners, and saying "we are not like them." Jesus reaction reflects the truth taught in Rom 3:23: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Thus, we can never take refuge in the sin of others, no matter how bad we might imagine them being. Think of the worst possible sinner that you can imagine -- a child abuser of the most perverted kind. Then listen to Jesus: "...except ye repent, ye shall likewise perish." Being under the influence of the devil is not a matter of degree. If Jesus is not Lord of your life, then Satan has control of you, and repentance is essential to change this state.

Repentance leads to a cessation of sin, or, at least the attempt on our part to get it out of our lives. The word itself means a turning around. To turn away from sin is not sufficient -- we must also turn toward something. Jesus talked about this in Mat 12:43-45: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth [it] empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last [state] of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation."

Jesus did not leave us void. We are not saved by repentance only. The positive aspect of the Christian life is summed up in a word: confession. Jesus made this a condition of salvation when he stated (Mat 10:32): "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." To this point we have established four conditions of salvation which prepare the alien sinner for the final step. The bible teaches these steps in a number of ways. We will see in the next chapter that one of the most informative ways is through the examples of conversion given in the book of Acts. We will consider all of these in the next chapter, but in order to get things into perspective, let us consider one of the most detailed cases of conversion (Acts 8:26-40):

"And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to [him], and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on [their] way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, [here is] water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all

thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

Note that the sequence of events which occurred follows exactly the conditions set by Jesus:

1. The eunuch heard the word both by reading the Old Testament and by further hearing from an inspired teacher. This was necessary as the New Testament was still being revealed.
2. The eunuch obviously believed the truth of the word of God. His faith came by hearing the word of God, both in written and spoken form.
3. While repentance is not explicitly mentioned in this example, we will see that it is in several others. The fact that it is not mentioned does not at all mean that it did not take place; and it is obvious from his actions that he was willing to make a major change in direction in his life.
4. The eunuch confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, which Philip states to be a condition of baptism. This summarizes the first four steps given by Philip to the eunuch.

It is clear, however, that we have left something out. Surely, from the example we can see that baptism was an integral part of preaching Christ. Jesus made baptism a condition of salvation in John 3:3-5: "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and [of] the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

If this is not baptism that Jesus is talking about, then what is it? We read in Rom 6:3-4: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." This tells us that the apostle Paul assumed that the Christians at Rome thoroughly understood that baptism put them into Jesus Christ. Further baptism is "into death" and we arise from it to "walk in newness of life." If that is not the rebirth of John 3:3-5, then what is?

We will leave these questions open for right now. The next chapter is totally dedicated to the subject of baptism, and there is no clearer doctrine taught in the New Testament than that of the purpose and practice of baptism. The two paragraphs above are merely to introduce this topic at this point for completeness. In summary, we have determined that Jesus' own words as recorded in the New Testament have established five conditions which must be satisfied if we are to do the will of our Father who is in Heaven:

1. Hear the truth (i.e., God's word)
2. Believe the truth
3. Repent of one's sins
4. Confess a belief in Christ, and
5. Be baptized into Christ.

It should be noted that baptism is the only one of these conditions that is performed once and only once. We should never stop hearing and studying the truth -- we never totally master it and we always need it to continue improving. Obviously, we should never stop believing. To stop repenting would mean that we would turn back and repeat the sins that we turned from when we first owned Christ as Lord. And finally, our confession of Christ is exactly what the great commission commands (Mat 28:18-20), and this charge applies to us for life.

While these are ongoing commitments of faithful Christians and not just one-time obligations, baptism is different. Legitimate baptism is only to be performed once. By legitimate, we mean that which is authorized by Jesus Christ, which would mean that it is performed as He prescribed and for the reason which He specified (either directly or through writers inspired by the Holy Spirit). Baptism is the only command of God that we are under today that is only performed once in satisfying our reasonable and spiritual service to their Lord (Rom 12:1).

03.06.02 - Keeping Ourselves Saved

3.6.2 KEEPING OURSELVES SAVED

While it is fairly simple to summarize that part of God's plan of salvation which puts a person into a saved condition, the entire New Testament is necessary to describe the standards set for people once they become Christians. Any attempt which we might make to summarize or reduce this would be futile and akin to establishing a creed. Is the New Testament a law like the Old Testament was? Yes and no. In the sense that it is the truth by which we regulate our lives, the answer is yes. In 1Co 9:21 the apostle Paul was discussing how he would not practice the Old Testament traditions when he was trying to convert gentiles so that he would not offend them. He stated: "To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law." Those "without law" were without the law of Moses, or the Old Testament law. Even though Paul was not under the Old Testament law, he was still under law to God, because he was under the law to Christ. The New Testament provides the truth -- the reality -- by which we can make Godly decisions within our lives today. It provides all moral truths with regard to all of the relationships of life. It also provides the truth by which our worship is pleasing to God. Finally, it provides the truth by which the church can be organized to best satisfy its great commission. In these regards, we are under law to Christ. In the sense that it is minimal set of specifications which when obeyed will merit our salvation, it is unlike the Old Testament, and is not a law in this respect. Unfortunately, many Christians want to view it this way. They want to determine the minimal requirements, satisfy them, and then get on with life. If this is the way you approach the New Testament, there is not the slightest chance that you will ever be able to understand it.

What does God want? Everything. Listen to the apostle Paul pleading with some of the same people who were proposing that "we continue in sin that grace may abound (Rom 6:1). In Rom 12:1: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, [which is] your reasonable service." The New Testament is not a set of rules, it is a set of principles. This set of principles will enable us to understand what it means to render our bodies a total sacrifice to Him. When this occurs you will no longer be "conformed to this world: but [will be] be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what [is] that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Can we ever hope to master and meet all of the principles of the New Testament? This would be sinless perfection, and we are never to feel that we have attained this (1Jn 1:8): "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." We are going to stumble and fall as weak babes in Christ, just as a baby has many falls while learning to walk. But this is a far cry from salvation by grace or faith only, which excuses virtually all disobedience to God's law. Christians cannot grow closer to God if their attitude is one of excusing their own sins. It is essential that we whole-heartedly repent, turn and despise their sin, and pray to God for forgiveness in our quest for perfection (1Jn 1:9-10; 1Jn 2:1-6):

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us [our] sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for [the sins of] the whole world. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

Christians make every attempt to be faithful, and ultimately, in the vast majority of cases with the help of God, they are. With this understanding of what scriptural faith is, we are ready to see the reason that several other myths of denominationalism go unchallenged.

04 - Myth 4: Baptism is of Secondary Importance

CHAPTER 4 MYTH 4: BAPTISM IS OF SECONDARY IMPORTANCE

04.01 - Why all the Fuss? - Definitions

4.1 WHY ALL THE FUSS? -- DEFINITIONS To place anything that God has commanded into the realm of secondary importance is to trivialize it. Baptism is among the clearest and most articulated doctrines in the New Testament. At the same time, there are more alternative teachings with regard to baptism than any other teaching in the denominations. These doctrines have arisen out of Roman Catholic and denominational traditions -- they are not the consequence of ambiguous biblical teaching. (When you complete this chapter you will have read the vast majority of the verses in the New Testament which deal with baptism, and you can determine the validity of this last statement for yourself.)

There was a time when denominations honestly and forthrightly discussed their differences with regard to baptism in an attempt to bring about true unity on this important doctrine. These attempts have largely been abandoned in favor of the teaching which is the title of this chapter. The reason for this is the overwhelming momentum of the inter-denominational efforts which emerged in conjunction with the radio and TV efforts of the 1940's and 1950's, and it continues heavily with this impetus even today. It is impossible for these preachers to take a definitive stand with regard to baptism, since it is impossible for them to baptize "over the air" (in any way). As a result of this, it became most convenient for them to ignore the tremendous number of scriptures which deal with baptism, and to declare that a person was saved by "faith only" or "accepting Jesus as your personal savior." When confronted with questions regarding baptism most of these religious leaders either state or necessarily imply that baptism is of secondary importance. The popular doctrine is that since you are saved by faith only, baptism is of secondary importance. So we hear: "Go to the church of your choice and be baptized according to the way that they teach you."

If we could find the basis for this quote in the scriptures, we would not question it. However, if scriptural baptism is what puts a person into Christ, then we must teach it! We cannot throw away a major teaching of Jesus and the apostles just because it is not convenient to radio and TV preachers. We cannot pick those scriptures that we wish to follow and throw away the rest (Rev 22:18-19; Mat 4:4). With these factors in mind, let us define the terminology that we will use in this chapter. The Greek word for baptism (baptizo) in the New Testament was not translated -- it was transliterated out of the Greek. Baptizo was not a dedicated religious word as baptism is today. It merely meant immersion, and it was applied to the immersion (typically in water) of anything. It started to be used for religious purposes with the preaching of John the Baptist. When we state the myth that baptism is of secondary importance, we are referring to that baptism which the bible states was commanded of and was practiced by Christians in the first century. (We shall see from the scriptures which will be quoted below that this was baptism in water.) By secondary importance, we mean that the most prevalent and common denominational teaching is to de-emphasize this practice to the point where many now believe that it has virtually nothing to do with salvation. At this point we will present the biblical teaching. As we have done above, this will be subdivided according to the teachings given in the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), the book of Acts, and the letters written to the churches (epistles). We plead with you to be patient

as we present this to you in the most logical way that we can.

04.02 - What the Bible Says About Baptism

4.2 WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT BAPTISM

Let us emphasize that we are not the least bit concerned here with what any given religious organization teaches on the subject. It would be impossible to state all of the variations of the beliefs and the history as to how they evolved. We are only concerned with the biblical teaching. While the following is not exhaustive, it is an attempt to totally represent the biblical view.

04.02.01 - The Gospels

4.2.1 THE GOSPELS

Baptism was not a religious practice under the Old Testament law, and (as we saw in Chapter 2) the Old Testament law was still in effect until it was nailed to the cross with Christ (Col 2:14). Thus, we would not expect the full teaching on baptism to be revealed until it was done so by the Holy Spirit through the apostles. This revelation is recorded in the book of Acts, and detailed teachings are given in the letters which the apostles wrote (epistles). However, baptism was so important that its foundations were established by Jesus while He was still on the earth. The first preacher to baptize was John the baptist. Mark's account is quite concise and informative (Mark 1:1-11): The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit. And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, [saying], Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Note the following from this passage:

1. John the baptist preached in preparation for the messiah, Jesus Christ, who was formally known as Jesus of Nazareth.
2. As part of this preparation John also preached: "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." However, this did not in any way relieve Jesus or any of the other Jews of their obligations under the Old Testament law.
3. This was clearly water baptism: "and [they] were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins."
4. John was not the Christ. He foretold of one who would shortly appear: "There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit."
5. Jesus' baptism by John was accompanied by a miracle which attested that Jesus was the one of whom John had foretold.

According to Matthew's account (Mat 3:14-15): "John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer [it to be so] now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him."

Since Jesus had no sin, he was not in need of "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." However, to provide the example to fulfil all righteousness, he allowed himself to be baptized. The next mention of baptism indicates that Jesus disciples baptized under His authority. In John 3:22-24 we read: "After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. For John was not yet cast into prison." Clearly this was water baptism, and the lack of distinction between that practiced by Jesus and John implies that they were quite similar (if not identical) in intent. As we continue to read (John 3:25-30):

Then there arose a question between [some] of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all [men] come to him. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I [must] decrease. The transition of disciples from John to Jesus was not something that Jesus wished to precipitate prematurely (John 4:1-3): "When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee." The final mention of baptism in the gospels is in the great commission. According to Matthew's account (Mat 28:18-20): "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen." The great commission commands us to baptize. The command to baptize is right along side the command to preach the gospel and to "teach all things I have commanded you." This shows that the great commission applies equally to us, since the great commission was one of the "all things" which Jesus commanded them. In Mark's account of the great commission (Mark 16:15-16): "And he [Jesus] said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Here Jesus made baptism a condition of salvation. Some argue that since Jesus did not say "he that believeth not and is not baptized shall be damned," only faith is the condition. However, if there were two conditions for non-salvation, one could be baptized without believing and still be saved. This would be nonsense. Of course, Jesus could have said "he that believeth not or is not baptized shall be damned." However, this would imply that it is possible to have faith without being obedient. As we saw in Chapter 2, this is never taught in the bible, and so we can see the reason that it is not implied here. The Holy Spirit brought to Mark's memory exactly what Jesus said and it was exactly what He meant. Both faith and the clear indication that that faith is alive (baptism) are commanded, and they are conditions of salvation. The person who refuses to be baptized does so because s/he does not believe the clear

commands of God. The gospels alone demonstrate God's commands that believers be baptized. However, this command was not fully understood or implemented until after the Old Testament law was no longer in effect. This occurred when Jesus died on the cross and ushered in the plan of salvation under which we now live. This is documented in the book of Acts.

04.02.02 - The Book of Acts

4.2.2 THE BOOK OF ACTS The book of Acts is effectively a continuation of the Gospel according to Luke (compare Luk 1:1-4 with Acts 1:1-2). It picks up in history where the gospels leave off -- right after the resurrection of Christ. Jesus appeared after his resurrection and taught them for the duration of 40 days (Acts 1:3; 1Co 15:3-6). Some of the final teachings of Jesus are given in Acts 1:4-8, after which he was observed to ascend into heaven (Acts 1:9-11). The remainder of the first chapter of the book of Acts covers the 10 days between Jesus' ascension and the Jewish religious holiday of Pentecost. Jesus was resurrected on the first day of the week at the time of year which coincided with the Jewish observance of the Passover. The word Pentecost comes from the word fifty, indicating that it occurs 50 days after the passover observance. The Jews counted both the beginning and the ending portions of the day. Thus, both the passover observance and the day of Pentecost fell upon the first day of the week. While this does not directly relate to the subject of baptism, it places the second chapter of the book of Acts into its proper context. For, on this day the apostles were immersed in the Holy Spirit, enabling them both to speak with His inspiration and to confirm what they said by definitive miracles. Acts 2:1-4: And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. This is the first record of such an event ever occurring, and it was the fulfillment of the prophecy which Jesus had spoken just a few days before (Acts 1:5): "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence." We will elaborate more on the baptism in (with) the Holy Spirit in Section 4.2.3.1 below. The baptism in the Holy Spirit was a promise; it was never commanded. The apostles did not practice it in the sense of doing anything to bring it about. You might validate this as you review Acts 2:1-4 once again. The essence of Acts chapter 2 is the sermon which Peter spoke. Everything else relates to the circumstances of the environment in which that sermon was spoken. Being inspired by the Holy Spirit, the sermon itself tells us today as it told them on the day of Pentecost what they needed to do to be saved. The first part of the sermon (Acts 2:17-21) explained the astounding events which everyone was observing. Peter quoted Old Testament scripture (Joel) to prove that the things which were being done had been carefully planned by God. This was not an illusion, a mass hysteria, or a ploy provoked by emotional manipulation (as is typical of many staged events today). The next portion of the sermon (Acts 2:22-24) appealed to their own observation. These people, many if not most of whom had been present when Jesus was crucified, had also observed His miracles and knew of His capabilities (reference Mark 15:31). This led directly to another quotation (Acts 2:25-27) from the Old Testament (Psa 16:8-10). By this Peter went on to reason with them that Jesus through His resurrection had fulfilled this prophecy and ascended to the throne of the kingdom (Acts 2:30-31): "Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell,

neither his flesh did see corruption." This was adequate proof for them, and they recognized the full validity of Peter's statement in Acts 2:36: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." The scriptures are very clear as to what transpired at this point (Acts 2:37-41):

Now when they heard [this], they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men [and] brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, [even] as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added [unto them] about three thousand souls.

Question: what would be your response if someone were to ask you "Men [and] brethren, what shall we do [to be saved]?" Would you take it upon yourself to improve upon that which was inspired by the Holy Spirit and spoken by the apostle Peter on this occasion? By what authority would you say that baptism should be omitted from your response? What in the New Testament indicates that it is of secondary importance? In this passage it is placed as a condition of salvation on the same level as repentance. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized." What could be said about those who refused to be baptized?

We are going to see that every detailed case of conversion given in the book of Acts states that the subject(s) were baptized. We repeat: there is no clearer doctrine spelled out in the New Testament than the importance that baptism plays in our salvation. We challenge those who teach otherwise to deal with all of the scriptures which are presented in this entire chapter. The next case of conversion is in Acts 8:1-40, and it is significant because it applied to Samaritans, a half-breed race which were generally shunned by the Jews (recall Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan women in John 4:9). It was the first step in taking the gospel to the "all nations." However, to get the context, let us first briefly review the chapters after Acts 2:1-47 that lead up to it. In Acts 3:1-26; Acts 4:1-37; Acts 5:1-42 we read of the persecutions to which the apostles were subjected from the Jews when the apostles performed miracles in the name of Jesus. Acts 6:1-15 shows an issue involving racial distinctions in the first century church and how it was resolved. Acts 7:1-60 is the sermon that Stephen gave to the Jews who "set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts 6:13-14). This was an interesting accusation in that it was partially true. However, anything that is only half true is 100% false. While it was true that the Old Testament law was nailed to the cross with Christ (Col 2:14), and that the temple would be destroyed (Mat 24:1-51), Stephen was not blaspheming the law or in any way disallowing the customs of Moses, which were still permitted under the New Testament. The entire seventh chapter of Acts is a review of the Old Testament, which demonstrates that the accusations against Stephen were without any foundation. However, as is usually the case, close-minded leaders turn to the only recourse that they have when presented with the clear truth: violence. The stoning of Stephen was much like throwing water onto a grease fire. It resulted in the very opposite of that which the Jews intended, and demonstrated the wisdom of God (Acts 8:4): "Therefore they that

were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." This leads us to the next documented cases of conversion which was different only in that it involved Samaritans (Acts 8:5-13):

Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed [with them]: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

There are a multitude of lessons that could be obtained from this passage, but we wish to remain on the subject of this chapter by demonstrating that the doctrine and practice of baptism was an integral part of the preaching of the gospel. Clearly this was water (and not Holy Spirit) baptism as we observe by reading on (Acts 8:14-17): "Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they [their] hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."

Nationality seemed to motivate the recording of the next case of conversion as well, which is by far the most detailed case in the New Testament. It involved a native Ethiopian who was a Jewish proselyte, demonstrating God's respect for faithfulness regardless of color or nationality. It occurs in Acts 8:26-39: And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to [him], and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on [their] way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, [here is] water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the

water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

Reread the above passage and note the following:

1. The eunuch heard the word from the Old Testament and from Philip who was inspired to speak the truth of the gospel.
2. The eunuch believed both the Old Testament prophesy and the new teaching which Philip imparted to him by preaching (Rom 10:17). It is necessarily implied that this "preaching of Jesus" included the doctrine of baptism.
3. While not explicitly stated, repentance is implied. The only condition which Philip placed upon his baptism was his willingness to confess his belief that Jesus is the Son of God.
4. The mode of baptism is clearly revealed to us by this example. There is not the slightest implication that baptism was of secondary importance.

Note that this example is totally consistent with the conditions which Jesus placed upon our salvation which are outlined in Section 3.6. The next example of conversion -- that of Saul of Tarsus (later called Paul) -- is one which is often seized upon for an example for us today. Yet I know of no one who claims to have been stricken blind as part of his/her getting into a covenant relationship with God. In reality, the experience that Paul had on the road to Damascus did not save him -- it only got his attention. What saved Paul was the same thing that saved the Jews on Pentecost, the Samaritans and the eunuch: a living faith in the word of God. This living faith motivated them to do God's will to the best of their knowledge and ability. See that it was this same living faith that Paul had as we consider his conversion in detail (Acts 9:1-22): And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: [it is] hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord [said] unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought [him] into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I [am here], Lord. And the Lord [said] unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for [one] called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting [his] hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my

name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, [even] Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard [him] were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

It is interesting that, just as the angel did not speak directly to the eunuch to tell him what he must do to be saved, Jesus did not speak directly to Paul to tell him what he must do to be saved. Paul asked the question: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord [said] unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." From that point forward the conversion of Paul was quite similar to all other examples in the New Testament.

Now Paul's "calling" was different in the sense that he was chosen to be an apostle (1Co 15:8-11). However, the process of conversion was the same. He was taught the gospel of Jesus Christ by natural means -- hearing the words of Ananias. He believed and was baptized.

Let us look further into this conversion, which is recalled by Paul during his preaching later on in the book of Acts (Acts 22:6-16): And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt [there], Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. This verse links baptism to washing away Paul's sins. If Paul was in a saved condition prior to baptism, then he was saved before having his sins washed away. The next case of conversion is recorded in the tenth chapter of Acts and it is further explained in Chapter 11. It is quite significant because it details the conversions of the first gentiles to Christ. We have already discussed the racial problems which existed in the first century church. So their conversions directly into the body of Christ, and not through being proselyted into Judaism (i.e., via circumcision), caused quite a stir among the existing converts, all of whom were Jews.

Because these conversion also involved the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we will take up that aspect of it in more detail in Section 4.2.3.1. We will summarize the story here and quote the scriptures that we feel most relevant, but we urge you to read both of these chapters in detail. The story begins with an introduction to Cornelius (Acts 10:1-2): "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian [band], [A] devout [man], and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always." Few people today would even think this man would be in need of salvation. However, recognize that we cannot be saved by the works of our own hands -- we are all in need of the blood of Christ regardless of how devout or righteous we might be. Cornelius in this condition (without Christ) received a vision of God which prepared him for the preaching of the apostle Peter. This vision (Acts 10:3-8) instructed him to send for Peter, which would take about a day to accomplish. At about the time that the messengers from Cornelius were arriving, Peter had a vision which instructed him to eat some meat which was unclean according to the Old Testament law (which Christians were no longer under). Peter refused to do so thinking that it was against God's law, and the response is given in Acts 10:15-16: "And the voice [spake] unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, [that] call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven." At this point Peter did not fully understand the vision (Acts 10:17). However, the men from Cornelius arrived at that very moment, and Peter consented to go with them. Once he got there, he put two and two together, as recorded in Acts 10:28: "And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I [unto you] without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?" Racial problems are not unique to our generation, and the breaking down of the walls that had so long separated Jew and gentile goes a long way toward explaining the meaning of the events of these two chapters. It is interesting that Peter would ask the reason that he was summoned; however, this might have been a rhetorical question to set the context for the preaching of the gospel.

Cornelius explained his vision and stated (Acts 10:33): "Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

Peter's response was very enlightening (Acts 10:34-35): "Then Peter opened [his] mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." This is a very interesting and definitive teaching with regard to the elimination of racism from the Lord's church. But what does this have to do with baptism? Much -- if we recognize that baptism was analogous to circumcision in that it is the act that puts a person into the Lord's kingdom. [We will show this in the next section when we discuss Col 2:8-15. However, if we recognize it at this point, it helps to explain the interaction in this chapter between the racial issue and baptism.]

Several Jewish Christians had come with Peter to observe. Those of their number who wanted to go back under the Old Testament law had no problem with gentiles being baptized if they were circumcised first. However, this would be the first case of their being baptized without the benefit of circumcision. The sermon that Peter proceeded to preach to them (Acts 10:34-43) is a very interesting, concise summary of the gospel. Peter did not have a chance to finish, however, before

the following events occurred (Acts 10:44-48):

While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days. The fact that the Holy Spirit fell upon them and enabled them to speak in tongues was not adequate demonstration of their salvation. It was, however, sufficient proof to the Jews accompanying Peter that these gentiles were fit subjects for baptism for the remission of their sins. So Peter "commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." If they refused this command claiming that their baptism in the Holy Spirit was ample demonstration of their salvation, would they be acceptable to God?

We will pick up this story again in Section 4.2.3.1, where we will show that Cornelius and the gentiles with him were, in fact, baptized in the Holy Spirit. As was the case on the day of Pentecost, they were not expecting it, praying for it, or in any other way anticipating it. Since we are concentrating on the subject of water baptism for the remission of sins at this point, we need only observe that these gentiles were converted the same way that all other Christians were and have been converted since Jesus died on the cross. They heard the word, believed it, and with a willingness to repent of their sins and confess their belief that Jesus was the son of God, they were baptized for the remission of their sins. As with many other conversions recorded in the book of Acts, miraculous events played a part, but they were peripheral to the actual process of conversion itself. That is, the miracles revealed and confirmed the truth -- exactly the role that the bible performs for us today. The process of hearing, believing and obeying the truth (our part) is identical for us today as it was for everyone converted in the first century.

Acts 11:1-30 further explains Acts 10:1-48, and then tells about the various other churches which were formed (especially Antioch), and the fact that the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26). This is quite significant, since most denominationalists today are under the impression that Jerusalem was the center of all church activity. Although several of the apostles remained at Jerusalem, the actual work of the church was as distributed as the Christians were. Christians did not need the apostles' presence, they had the authority of Christ. Neither did they need a central organization, all they needed was the truth.

Acts 12:1-25 tells of the ratcheting up of the persecution, now by the puppet government which was installed by Rome to rule the Jews. However, the motivation was still to please the Jews who were still very concerned about losing their political and economic base if the church was allowed to grow. Despite all of this Acts 12:24 sums it up: "But the word of God grew and multiplied." Christians were being made, souls were being saved, but it was the word of God that was growing and multiplying.

Early in Acts 13:1-52 we read about the church at Antioch sending out Paul and Barnabas on what is generally called Paul's first missionary journey. They needed no edict or authority from Jerusalem -- they had the word. Chapters 13 and 14 contain the experiences of Paul and Barnabas as they preached the gospel and established churches in most of the cities that they visited. There are no individual cases of conversion detailed in these chapters. Nor are any

documented in Acts 15:1-41, which we have discussed in detail in Section 2.2.2.

There are two detailed cases of conversions in Acts 16:1-40, which begins what is commonly called Paul's second missionary journey. The first is described beginning in verse 13, but to include the location, we will also quote verse 12 (Acts 16:12-15): And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, [and] a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted [thither]. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard [us]: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought [us], saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide [there]. And she constrained us. At this point (the writer) Luke apparently understood that the reader would assume that if she believed what Paul said, she would be baptized. So there is not an assertion of the fact, but "And when she was baptized ..." The next case is given after Paul and Silas were thrown in jail after exorcising a spirit of divination from a young maiden whose owners were using the evil spirit that possessed her for their gain. Losing their means of income, they stirred up the city against Paul and Silas and the magistrates had them put in the inner prison. God intervened with an earthquake and miraculously all of the prisoners were released. Generally, a Roman jailor who allowed prisoners to escape paid with his life. Apparently to avoid this fate, the jailor was about to kill himself, where we pick up the story (Acts 16:27-34): And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed [their] stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

Once again we see that the pattern is the same. Hearing the truth, the jailor believed, repented of his past sins and was baptized for the remission of sins. As the book of Acts progresses, we would expect it to become less explicit with regard to some of the details of conversions. For example, when it comes to the Corinthians in chapter 18, it merely states (Acts 18:8): "And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." A final example is quite informative in that it indicates that calling an act baptism does not qualify it to be "in the name of the Lord." Let us consider the passage first (Acts 19:1-7): And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Spirit since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Spirit. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard [this], they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid [his] hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and

they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve.

We read in Acts 8:1-40 that it was through the laying on of the apostles hands that the Holy Spirit was given. Paul, in discussing this with these disciples in Ephesus discovered that, not were they ignorant of this, they had not even been baptized by the right authority. True, they had been baptized unto John's baptism, and in the era of John the baptist this was according to God's will. However, this is not what God wants for us now. We must be baptized in the name (i.e., by the authority) of the Lord Jesus. The ramifications of this are tremendous! Why were you baptized? Was it because your church leaders told you to? Was it to gain entry into some denomination? Was it without your knowledge when you were a little child? Or, was it by the authority of Jesus Christ? If it was not by His authority and for the purpose which He determined -- for the remission of sins -- then you need to be baptized as those in Acts 19:1-41 were. If not, then why were those in Acts 19:1-41 commanded to be baptized again? Is God a respecter of persons?

We have presented all of the detailed cases of conversion given in the book of Acts (and hence the New Testament, since all of them are recorded in Acts). We notice that some of the steps which are obviously a part of Gods plan to bring man to redemption are omitted in some of these examples. We do not have an explicit statement (although it is implied) that they all heard, believed, repented and confessed their belief in Jesus being the son of God. However, we read the explicit statement that those converted were baptized in every single case. This is no fluke -- God does not put something in the scriptures for no reason. As for the reason and importance of baptism, this is covered in detail in the epistles which we will consider next. Let us complete this section with a question: if baptism is mentioned so often in the book of Acts, why is it not discussed more from the pulpit? Why is it so skillfully avoided? As we continue to see the frequency, clarity and consistency with which baptism is discussed in the New Testament, keep these questions in mind.

04.02.03 - The Letters to the Churches

4.2.3 THE LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES When the first converts were commanded to be baptized, there appeared to be a knowledge of the mode and purpose of baptism. There was no controversy as to whether it was "necessary" or what its purpose was. There is no doubt that the work of John the Baptist not only introduced Jesus but served to prepare the people for the religious practice of baptism as well. We see this on the day of Pentecost when the first gospel sermon was preached under the inspiration (and with the baptism) of the Holy Spirit. There was no question as to the mode and purpose of baptism when Peter commanded (Acts 2:38): "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

It seems, however, that the early Christians were just like us in that they soon forgot the reasons for and the significance of what they had been through. To many, baptism might have become a mere prerequisite for local church fellowship, as it has become to many today. They may have viewed it merely as a work to be accomplished and forgotten. It may have been relegated to a secondary role, as we have seen is generally the case in denominationalism today. For these reasons the writers of the epistles, and the apostle Paul in particular, provided additional information with regard to baptism as they wrote the various churches. We will consider these according to the letters in which they occur. Remember as you read these letters that they were addressed to Christians.

4.2.3.1 ROMANS

Some at the church at Rome had apparently fallen under the influence of false teacher who led them to exploit the grace of God. Essentially they called evil good and good evil by teaching that if Christians did any works of righteousness they would not be relying upon the grace of God. [While this extreme might not exist today, the basic concept is one that keeps many from observing scriptural baptism.] We see Paul responding to this in Rom 6:1-11:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also [in the likeness] of [his] resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with [him], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let us summarize the teachings of this passage:

1. The idea that we somehow glorify God by continuing in sin is as far from the doctrine of Christ as one can get, and it is sure to result in eternal condemnation to those who live by it.
2. Paul understood that the Christians at Rome understood that they had been "baptized into Christ." We saw above that baptism was that final act in all detailed conversions given in the book of Acts. One cannot have fellowship with God or Christ as long as they are in their sins. Baptism being the final act of conversion is consistent with it being for the remission of sins, which is what is taught in Acts 2:38.
3. While they seemed to understand that they were baptized into Jesus Christ, they did not seem to understand that they were "baptized into his death." This is allegorical, the burial in water representing a burial after our death to sin (repentance).
4. The death is not nearly as important as the resurrection: "that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." This is the essence of what Paul was trying to communicate to them. However, the lessons that we learn with regard to baptism are significant.
5. Our death to sin is analogous to Christ's death on the cross; repentance is analogous to his crucifixion: "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with [him], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."

Before we leave this passage, let us compare it with the rebirth which Jesus made a condition of salvation. Recall what Jesus said to Nicodemus (John 3:3-6): "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and [of] the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

If being born "of water and the Spirit" is not accomplished by the act of faith which results in baptism, then what does? Baptism is what puts a person into Christ, and if one is not in Christ, "he cannot see the kingdom of God." If one does not become a part of the body of Christ, "he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Indeed, the body of Christ, the church and the kingdom of God are one and the same (Eph 1:23; Col 1:13), and when you enter one, you enter them all.

4.2.3.2 FIRST CORINTHIANS The primary problem in Corinth was one of division. Early in the first chapter we see that they were denominating the church by naming their various factions after men. Paul uses the doctrine of baptism to demonstrate to them that this should not be the case (1Co 12:12-13): "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also [is] Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether [we be] Jews or Gentiles, whether [we be] bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." In Rom 6:1-23 we learned that Christians were "baptized into Jesus Christ." Here we learn that Christians are "all baptized into one body," and therefore, there should be absolutely no divisions within that body. We can say that the Corinthians were much closer to unity than are the denominations. At least the Corinthians did not disagree on the purpose or

mode of baptism. Clearly they understood that it was the act of faith that added them to the Lord's body, the church.

4.2.3.3 GALATIANS

We discussed the difference between the old and new laws in Chapter 2, and to communicate this was the main objective of Paul's letter to the church at Galatia. Note how he weaves the doctrine of baptism into the argument against racial division, just as he did for the Corinthians with regard to their doctrinal divisions (Gal 3:23-29): But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster [to bring us] unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye [be] Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Note the following:

1. Faith is used interchangeably here with the entire gospel of Jesus Christ when he says "before faith came."
2. The Old Testament law was like a schoolmaster to bring them to a point where the sacrifice of Christ could have its full meaning. However, after Christ had delivered the gospel there was no longer a need for the schoolmaster.
3. As is true with the Romans and Corinthians, Paul assumes that they understand that they were "baptized into Christ." What they did not seem to understand is that they should have "put on Christ." Just as when we put on a coat, anyone looking at us sees primarily the coat, when we put on Christ that is what should be seen predominantly in our lives.
4. Conclusion: there can be no racial, economic or sexual distinctions as to the acceptability of those who are baptized into Christ -- all are equally acceptable, and there should be absolutely no divisions in His body.

We are beginning to see that the teachings on baptism are not isolated passages that can be taken out of context. There are universal doctrines which require considerable effort to avoid and misunderstand.

4.2.3.4 COLOSSIANS The problems at Colosse were much the same as those which existed in Galatia. The Judaizing teachers within the church were starting with the binding of circumcision in an attempt to force all Christians to observe the entire Old Testament law (see Acts 15:5). To this the apostle Paul gave a number of responses, the following of which included a reference to baptism (Col 2:8-15):

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with [him]

through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; [And] having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Observe the following:

1. Circumcision was that unique and totally unreasonable act which God had given to the nation of Israel through which they were to separate themselves from the world and confirm their covenant with Him. It was unreasonable in that there is no way that human wisdom would lead to such an action. The Jews thoroughly understood its significance, and the gentile Christians at Colosse were also probably given this Old Testament background as part of their instruction as Christians.

2. "In whom [Christ] also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with [him] through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." Clearly baptism has replaced circumcision as the action which puts one into the kingdom of God, which as we saw above is another designation for the body of Christ, or the church. Baptism is the "circumcision of Christ."

3. Notice the similarity between the shadow of things to come (see Col 2:17), circumcision, and the reality in Christ: baptism: a) Both were totally unreasonable actions from the point of view of man, and, as such, neither is a work of man's origin. b) Both are things that are done to a person, not something that a person does (albeit a person must subject himself to it). c) Both mark that point in time at which there is the separation from the world and the entrance into full citizenship of the people of God -- circumcision under the Old Testament and baptism under the New Testament. d) Both are considered by the holy scriptures to be of the highest importance in satisfying the desires of God.

4. "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." When did this quickening occur? Clearly, when they were circumcised with the circumcision of Christ.

5. Is there something magic in immersion? Should we make it into some mystical rite? Absolutely not. What makes baptism valid is not the mere act itself -- it is the "faith of the operation of God," or as the American Standard puts it "faith in the working of God." Baptism is not a work of man, it is an act of faith in the working of God.

6. Baptism without faith is invalid. However, this does not imply that faith can exist without baptism. We are not at liberty to tell God how we are going to express our faith in Him, how we are going to be free from our sins, or how we are going to enter His kingdom. He has set the terms, and if we have faith in Him, we will accept His terms. Baptism without faith is invalid; faith without baptism is equally invalid.

4.2.3.4 FIRST PETER

While we have presented over a dozen scriptures which indicate that baptism is that act which puts the convert into a saved condition, the only scripture which explicitly states that "baptism saves" is the first letter which we have from the apostle Peter. Let us consider this passage carefully (1Pe 3:18-22): For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto [even] baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

Some have made this a difficult scripture by their mystical interpretation process. It is important that we allow our reasoning to progress from the known to that which might be somewhat obscure.

Let us subdivide the passage and establish that which is clear from this passage, especially as it relates to baptism:

1. The first part is quite understandable: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the spirit ..." We understand that Jesus gave His life on the cross for us that, although we are unjust, we can be justified and enter into a covenant relationship with God. Jesus was "put to death in the flesh" -- crucified and buried. But he was "quickened by the spirit" -- made alive by the power of the His eternal and divine spirit.

2. "By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison ..." Not in the body, but by His spiritual presence Jesus went and preached to the spirits which are now "in prison," i.e., awaiting the final judgment. Jesus is often declared to have had a presence in Old Testament times (see 1Co 10:1-4). This presence was through His spirit, although the actual preaching was done by Noah. The spirits in prison are those who were enslaved to sin in Noah's time.

3. "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water." This is speaking of the spirits in prison. From the record we know that they were extremely disobedient. We also read in 2Pe 2:5 that Noah was "a preacher of righteousness," and thus we can conclude that Jesus spoke through him. Noah was saved, or separated from sin, "by water."

Note: the author would certainly not be dogmatic with regard to the meaning of the scriptures given above. There are alternative explanations which are equally as plausible. However, the resolution of these has no effect upon the interpretation or application of the verses which follow.

4. "The like figure whereunto [even] baptism doth also now save us ..." In Noah's time the world was totally consumed with sin (see Gen 6:5). The world was completely emersed with water, which thoroughly cleansed it from the sinful humanity which inhabited it. Just as Noah was separated from sin by this "baptism" of the earth, we are separated from our sin by faith in the working of God when we are obedient in baptism. In the sense that baptism separates us from our sins and places us into Christ, baptism saves. However, we have emphasized that we are not saved by baptism only any more than we are saved by anything else only.

5. "... (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) ..." It is not the mere washing of the dirt off the body that saves. If so, all would be saved. It is the involvement of the very spirit of the individual. Baptism must be preceded by faith, repentance and the willingness to confess the belief that Jesus is the Son of God. This is summarized as "the answer of a good conscience toward God."

6. "... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ ..." Removing the parenthetical statement, the verse would read: "The like figure whereunto [even] baptism doth also now save us ... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ ..." This is totally consistent with the teaching of the apostle Paul which we reviewed above in which baptism is referenced as a burial with Christ, e.g., Rom 6:4: "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Without the resurrection of Christ, baptism would be meaningless.

While the context of the statement "baptism doth also now save us" may be difficult to resolve, the statement itself is not. It is totally consistent with every other passage on water baptism in the New Testament, all of which must be explained away if, in fact, the act of baptism is not that act which transforms the alien sinner into Christ. This brings to a close the biblical teachings with regard to water baptism. Avoiding this overwhelming body of evidence, false teachers within the denominations have used a number of arguments to relegate baptism to a secondary role, if not denying its role in salvation altogether. The remaining sections of this chapter will deal with some of these. We will first consider other types of baptism which the New Testament defines. Then we will discuss the common objections which have been made in an attempt to disregard the biblical doctrine. Finally, we return once again to the importance of sound doctrine in general.

04.02.04 - Other Baptisms

4.2.4 OTHER BAPTISMS

Frequently those arguing against the biblical doctrine of baptism will evade the issue by arguing that the baptism mentioned in a given scripture is not water baptism. That there are other types of baptism discussed in the New Testament is not the issue, and we will deal with them in the following subsections. However, we have seen in our study above that the one baptism practiced by the church in the first century was emersion in water for the remission of sins. In Eph 4:1-6 the apostle Paul wrote:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [There is] one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who [is] above all, and through all, and in you all.

Thus, understanding and practicing this "one baptism" was just as essential to keeping "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" as understanding the fact that there is one Spirit, one God and One Lord, etc. To intentionally confuse others by stating that we are now subject to two or three baptisms destroys the unity of the Spirit and does despite to the bond of peace. That emersion in water for the remission of sins was the one baptism practiced in the first century is quite obvious from the scriptures presented above. Thus, generally when the word baptism appears in the New Testament, this is what is being spoken of. Those who practice any type of water baptism are tasked with the heavy responsibility of explaining why they also practice another in light of Paul's assertion "there is one baptism." The burden of proof is upon them; I cannot explain it. That other baptisms are described in the New Testament is readily admitted. We will discuss three others: (1) baptism of the Holy Spirit, (2) baptism of fire, and (3) baptism for the dead. We will also discuss the use of the word baptism in reference to an emersion in suffering. As these are discussed it will become clear that, while they existed, they were not commanded. Indeed, if the mere mention of the existence of a type of baptism in the New Testament necessarily implies that we are supposed to practice it today, then we would need to practice all four or five of these. However, as we examine them more closely we will see that this is not the case, and that "there is one baptism" practiced by the Lord's church.

04.02.04.01 - Baptism of the Holy Spirit

4.2.4.1 BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Holy Spirit baptism is by far the type of baptism most often confused with the scriptural baptism which is commanded. Some would totally write off all of the arguments made above by substituting Holy Spirit baptism in every occurrence of baptism, thereby mystifying the process and making it a purely subjective experience. This blurring of reality is difficult to deal with, and all we can do is plead with those so inclined to read the scriptures objectively. For example, read the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:1-40. How can this be made into Holy Spirit baptism? It is just not there! In all cases where Holy Spirit baptism occurred, it is so described. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was first mentioned by John the Baptist (Mat 3:11): "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and [with] fire." Let us defer discussion of baptism with fire for the present except to say that if this statement were a command, we would also be commanded to be baptized with fire. Some rationalize that they are the same thing, but we will show in the next section that the baptism with fire was an extreme warning, a threat of the terrors of hell. As contrasted with this, the baptism of the Holy Spirit was a promise, and it is described as such throughout the New Testament. As an aside, it is very important that we do not confuse being filled with the Holy Spirit with being baptized in the Holy Spirit. These are two different things. We see many good men who were totally dedicated to God described as being "filled with the Holy Spirit." For example, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist is described in Luk 1:67 as being "filled with the Holy Spirit." Clearly the baptism of the Holy Spirit had not yet occurred -- John the Baptist who predicted it was not yet even born. As further evidence, consider the words of Jesus in John 7:37-39: In the last day, that great [day] of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet [given]; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) So while there were those prior to the resurrection of Christ who were filled with the Holy Spirit, there was a further promise of the giving of the Holy Spirit which had not occurred. This would be ushered in by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The very figure itself -- immersion as opposed to filling -- is indicative of a greater measure.

Recall that Jesus was the one who promised to send the Holy Spirit (John 14:26): "But the Comforter, [which is] the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." This was on the night that He was betrayed. Clearly this is a promise, not a command. Although we should realize that this promise is not limited to the baptism in the Holy Spirit, this greater revelation was going to be heralded by the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

We know that the baptism of the Holy Spirit had not occurred prior to the day of Pentecost by reading the first verses of the book of Acts (Acts 1:1-8): The former treatise have I made, O

Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: And, being assembled together with [them], commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, [saith he], ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Note first that even this is limited to the apostles: "being assembled together with them" i.e., the apostles. At this point he commanded them "to wait for the promise of the Father, which, [saith he], ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence."

Thus, the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was repeated specifically to the apostles. At this point the apostles were still not fully understanding what this meant. They still supposed that this meant a political or military empowerment: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

Jesus knew that when they were enlightened by the Holy Spirit they would understand, so he stated what they were to expect upon their baptism: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

It is quite clear that the fulfillment of this prophesy came only about ten days later on the day of Pentecost. Read carefully exactly what happened (Acts 2:1-4): And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. From the last verse of the previous chapter we see that the "they" here is the apostles, the very same as Jesus had repeated the promise to a few days earlier. They were the only ones who had the capacity to be witnesses of Him, having been with him throughout His ministry (see Acts 1:21-22).

"... they were all with one accord in one place." It does not say that they had yet instituted meetings on the first day of the week. Pentecost fell on the first day of the week; however, they could have been together for that holiday celebration. In any event, there was no record of any type of emotional stimulation or any other man-made invocation of the action of the Holy Spirit. This is totally consistent with 2Pe 1:21: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake [as they were] moved by the Holy Ghost." It was totally unexpected.

"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." This was not a group illusion. It was a supernatural event which could be clearly seen and clearly heard by the natural senses of men and women. It was not wind, but this was the closest thing to describe what they heard; it was not fire, but that was the closest thing to describe what they saw. However, what they saw and heard were clearly not anything that they had never seen nor heard before. The "them" here is the same as the "they" previously -- the apostles.

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." This too is clearly a supernatural event which proved definitively the truth of what the apostles were speaking. This would not have been possible had the apostles been using language which could not be understood. This event defines what it means to "speak in other tongues." Until and unless the New Testament enlarges the definition, these tongues were languages which could clearly be understood by those who heard it in their native tongues. (Acts 2:5-8): "And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?"

There is nothing else in Acts 1:1-26; Acts 2:1-47 that tells us that this was an occurrence of a baptism in the Holy Spirit other than the timing which coincides with the words of Jesus recorded in Acts 1:5 ("For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence"). There is only one other situation which is in any way comparable to this. Interestingly, while Pentecost was the first preaching of the gospel to the Jews, the second occurrence of baptism in the Holy Spirit occurred when the gospel was preached to the first gentiles.

We discussed the conversion of Cornelius and the gentiles that were present on that occasion above in Section 4.2.2. We will not repeat that background. However, at this point we wish to focus on the aspects of that event that made it a baptism in the Holy Spirit. Recall that as Peter was preaching the gospel of Christ to them (Acts 10:44-48): "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days."

We know that when "the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word," this was a baptism in the Holy Spirit because in Acts 11:1-30 after those of the circumcision contended with Peter about it, this was his reply (Acts 11:15-18): "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as [he did] unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I

could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

"The Holy Spirit fell on them [the gentiles], as on us [the apostles] at the beginning." Notice that Peter makes a distinction between this event and what had become the more routine imparting of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of the apostles hands. This was not the imparting that we observed, for example, in Acts 8:1-40. It was a direct bestowal from God which was therefore like that which the apostles experienced in the beginning.

It was the second occurrence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. If not, then why would Peter state: "Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit?" Then he went on to argue that this was God's testimony that they were fit subjects for baptism. A careful reading of Acts 10:1-48 and 11 will show that this second occurrence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit was as much for the benefit of the Jewish converts as it was for the gentiles. Indeed, while the speaking in tongues was for the unconverted in Acts 2:1-47, it is now for the converted.

Why was such a sign needed for believers? The answer lies in the deep-rooted racial prejudice which is still so evident in our world today. What would it take to convince the religious bigot today? God did everything that he could short of forcing them to believe, and apparently the demonstration had an immediate positive effect. However, from the recurring problems of the Judaizing Christians in most of the churches that Paul wrote to, it did not totally solve the problem. This second occurrence of the baptism with the Holy Spirit was quite analogous to the first. Note the following similarities:

1. It was an introduction of the gospel to a new "race" of people (the Jews in Acts 2:1-47, the gentiles in Acts 10:1-48),
2. It was not the result of emotionalism -- in both cases it was totally unexpected, and
3. It was clear proof to even the most hardened of skeptics (or the most prejudiced) that the gospel was indeed the will of God. The two events recorded in Acts 2:1-47 and Acts 10:1-48 are the only events that the New Testament identifies as being baptisms with the Holy Spirit. The author would be in sin to state that it occurred at any other time (2Jn 1:9). The purpose here, however, is not to convince you of this nearly as much as it is to get you to investigate this for yourself. So, search the book of Acts in detail and determine if any other events are stated to be a baptism with the Holy Spirit. However, recognize that the essence and true value of the promise of the Holy Spirit is not the miracles which were produced -- it was the revelation of the truth, for it is in the truth of God that we have salvation.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit were not limited to those who were baptized with the Holy Spirit. Let's review Acts 8:1-40 once again. There we see a man who was endowed with gifts of the Holy Spirit, Philip, preaching to the Samaritans. Philip had received these gifts from the laying on of the apostles hands (possibly as recorded in Acts 6:5-6). The result of Philip's preaching is recorded in Acts 8:6: "And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did."

Acts 8:7-11 tells about a man named Simon who had previously influenced these people with his sorcery and tricks. "But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of

God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done" (Acts 12:1-25; Acts 13:1-52).

It is clear, however, that while Philip could preach, confirm the truth he spoke with miracles, baptize and thus lead others to salvation, he could not impart the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the new converts. Of course, prior to the completion of the New Testament, which would thoroughly furnish mankind unto every good work, it was necessary for new converts to be endowed with these gifts so that they would have access to the truth. The problem was that the apostles who could impart this through the laying on of their hands were in Jerusalem (Acts 8:14-19):

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they [their] hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. With the exception of Acts 2:1-47 and Acts 10:1-48 (the baptisms with the Holy Spirit) there is no record of direct impartations of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit separate and apart from the laying on of the hands of the apostles. Acts 19:1-41 gives another example (Acts 19:5-6): "When they heard [this], they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid [his] hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied."

If the baptism with the Holy Spirit were to occur today, we would expect it to happen just as it did in the first century as recorded in the book of Acts. It would not be brought about by emotions or the will of man. However, when men and women were gathered together serving God to the best of their ability according to His word, He would act upon them in a way which was so obviously supernatural and miraculous that testimony of men to this effect would not be required. In conclusion, the baptism with the Holy Spirit was a promise of Jesus. It was not something that was commanded, and it cannot be obeyed. The two times that it was recorded to have occurred in the New Testament were truly extraordinary events which ushered in a new era in what God expected from His people. These baptisms were totally sufficient to set in motion the revelation of the entire gospel of Christ, through which we are saved. Thus, they thoroughly fulfilled the promise which John the Baptist and Jesus made with regard to Holy Spirit baptism.

04.02.04.02 - Baptism of Fire

4.2.4.2 BAPTISM OF FIRE The baptism of fire is completely different from the baptism with the Holy Spirit, as we can see by reading the rest of the words of John the Baptist as presented in Mat 3:11-12: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and [with] fire: Whose fan [is] in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Note the contrast between the wheat and the chaff. The wheat will obtain the benefits of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the essence of which was the revelation of the truth. The chaff would be burned with unquenchable fire -- the baptism with fire. If this is not talking about the judgment, then this language is quite misleading, which we doubt. No other mention is made of the baptism of fire per se in the rest of the New Testament with the exception of the same account in the other gospels. However, emersion in fire, whether it be literal or figurative of something much worse is a continuous warning throughout the New Testament. Well over half of the time that the word fire is used in the New Testament it is referring to this place of eternal torment of the unrighteous. This baptism was not commanded -- we are informed of it to warn us from the wrath of God to come.

Some have thought that because fire is mentioned in the Pentecost account, that this was the baptism with fire. Acts 2:3 reads: "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." This was not a baptism with fire -- fire was not even involved. If this was a baptism with fire, then Acts 2:2 would be a baptism in wind ("... And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting"). Neither wind nor fire were involved.

04.02.04.03 - Baptism for the Dead

4.2.4.3 BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD The subject of baptism for the dead is, admittedly, one of those writings of Paul "in which are some things hard to be understood" (2Pe 3:16). This being the case, it is essential that we do not over-ride those very clear and easy-to-understand scriptures, such as those which related to water baptism given above. As contrasted with the repetitive nature of those scriptures, there is only one which relates to baptism for the dead, 1Co 15:29: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead? And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?" In order to begin to understand this verse it is essential that you read the entire 15th chapter. The apostle Paul is dealing with some false teachers who were teaching that there was no resurrection of the dead (1Co 15:12). He gives a series of a dozen or so arguments (depending upon how you count) as to reasons that this teaching was false. It is a tremendously fascinating study, and if you have not studied it, we urge you to do so. To understand verse 29 we must recognize that the apostle Paul was still adding to this argumentation. This argument is fairly self contained. There are several plausible explanations which fit the context. For example, some believe that the "baptism for the dead" is a baptism in suffering for the cause of Christ. This is consistent with the argumentation -- why would they do this if there was not a resurrection. Why would the apostles be suffering to the extent that they were? This fits with the next question: "And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?"

We believe that a much more plausible explanation is that the false teachers in Corinth were themselves practicing the false doctrine of baptism for the dead. This creates absolutely no need for twisting the obvious meanings of the words, and it presents a devastating argument which would completely destroy the influence of the false teachers (at least upon those who were honest). In effect, it worked one false doctrine against another. If you do not believe in the resurrection from the dead, why do you practice baptism for the dead?

While we do not believe it essential to know exactly the meaning of this verse, and would surely not be dogmatic about it, the following arguments support the view that the false teachers were, in fact, practicing the false doctrine of baptism for the dead:

1. Paul asks "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead..." He does not include himself or the apostles in this practice. We know that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb 9:27). There is not one shred of evidence anywhere in the New or Old Testaments that there is anything that the living can do can have an influence over the fate of the dead. Just the opposite is taught (e.g., see Luk 16:19-31). Thus, baptism in behalf of the dead would be a complete contradiction to everything which the bible teaches with regard to our salvation.

2. "... if the dead rise not at all?" The people teaching this had to be the same as the ones practicing baptism for the dead or else the entire argument would be irrelevant. The false teachers could merely respond: we don't and they shouldn't because there is no resurrection. Clearly, the very same ones who taught that there was no resurrection were practicing baptism for the dead.

This is certainly not a good authority upon which we should base any such practice (as some have).

3. "... why are they then baptized for the dead?" This argument is truly devastating. Paul saved it for almost the last argument that he presented. Here they were practicing baptism for the dead when they did not even believe that the dead would be raised.

4. "And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?" Note the switch. They practice baptism for the dead but do not stand in jeopardy. We do not practice baptism for the dead, but the very fact that we (the apostles) stand in jeopardy every hour is ample evidence that they knew that Jesus was resurrected and that Jesus taught that they too would be resurrected from the dead.

5. The fact that Paul cites a practice as part of an argument does not infer that he agrees with the practice. There are several examples which could be given; a good one is recorded in Rom 2:25: "For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision." Obviously Paul was not teaching the necessity for circumcision, but for purposes of argumentation he allowed for a moment that it would profit if we were able to keep the entire law flawlessly. It was not necessary for Paul to oppose a doctrine as absurd as baptism for the dead, and to do so would not have addressed the subject (i.e., the resurrection).

Again, we would not be dogmatic about this, but it seems to us to be the most logical explanation.

If we assume that baptism for the dead was being practiced at all (even erroneously), it further confirms the early Christians' belief that baptism was essential to salvation. Again, however, there is absolutely no evidence that baptism for the dead was in any way sanctioned by the apostles.

04.02.04.04 - The Baptism of John

4.2.4.4 THE BAPTISM OF JOHN The baptism John the baptist was authorized of God because John the baptist was sent of God. It was for the remission of sins, but it was not to put the subject into the body of Christ because the church had not been established prior to the day of Pentecost (the first recorded preaching of the gospel after the death, burial and resurrection of Christ). Thus, it was necessary for those baptized by John's authority (i.e., in his name) to be baptized again into the name of Christ. This is clear from a passage that begins in Acts 18:24 and ends in 19:7: And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, [and] mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto [them], and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, [and that] publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ. And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard [this], they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid [his] hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve.

We will not belabor a discussion of this passage since it has been discussed in Section 4.2.3.1. However, it is interesting that "they should believe on him [Jesus]" infers that they should be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus; for, when they heard the first, they were obedient to the second.

04.02.04.05 - Other Mentions of Baptism

4.2.4.5 OTHER MENTIONS OF BAPTISM The word baptism means immersion, and anywhere that we might find immersion we might find it translated (or transliterated) as baptism. In most cases its figurative use is intended to convey the meaning of an immersion in suffering. Consider Mat 20:20-23:

Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping [him], and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but [it shall be given to them] for whom it is prepared of my Father. The meaning is quite clear.

Similarly, in Luk 12:49-53: "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law."

Uses of the word baptism in such contexts do not relate to the major premise of this chapter. Those who would invoke these scriptures in an attempt to place baptism in a secondary role are merely trying to confuse the issues.

04.03 - Common Objections Against Baptism

4.3 COMMON OBJECTIONS AGAINST BAPTISM

We anticipate that there will be some arguments made on behalf of the myth that baptism is secondary. In this section we anticipate those which we have heard in the past. We encourage the study of these possible arguments since study motivated by a search for the truth can only increase faith.

04.03.01 - Salvation is Not by Works

4.3.1 SALVATION IS NOT BY WORKS The reasoning applied is given by the following syllogism:

1. Major premise: Salvation is not by works, 2. Minor premise: Baptism is a work; therefore 3. Conclusion: Baptism can have nothing to do with salvation. Of course, this logic could be applied to obtain release from any and all of God's commands. Example: Hearing is a work. If not, why not? It certainly requires more effort than baptism. Are we to refrain from hearing the truth so that we will not be saved by works? Apparently those who avoid hearing the truth think so.

Those who apply the logic above usually believe in faith only, a myth which we covered in sufficient detail in Chapter 3. However to get the discussion going, consider the response that Jesus gave when he was asked what one needed to do to work the works of God (John 6:29): "Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Thus, Jesus considered faith to be a work. According to the logic given above, faith can have nothing to do with salvation. Clearly something is wrong.

What is wrong is that both the major premise and the minor premise are false. However, they are half true. Let's explore the half that is true and attempt to adjust them so that they can be of value to us.

Two passages are usually quoted to support the major premise: Tit 3:5 and Eph 2:8-9. Let us study what these passages actually teach and modify our major premise appropriately. Consider first Tit 3:4-7: But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

There are several kinds of works: (1) works purely devised and executed by God, (2) works devised of God but executed by man, and (3) works purely devised and executed by man. Question: which one of these three is the apostle Paul talking about when he said "not by works" above. Let's consider them in turn:

1. A simple reading indicates that Paul could not possibly be talking about works which purely devised and executed by God: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done."

2. Those who believe in faith only believe that Paul was talking about the second alternative which we have proposed: works devised (and commanded) by God which are then executed by men. However, if this is true and we are not saved by such works, then either we are: a) saved by works which are purely devised and executed by man (see alternative 3 below), or b) we are saved by works purely devised and executed by God.

We know of no one who purports to believe the bible who accepts alternative "a" as being reasonable. However, the only other alternative is "b." This was the only conclusion that Calvin

could come to, and it is the logical conclusion if it is sinful to be obedient to God. But how can anyone possibly believe such a thing -- every page of Gods word screams that this is erroneous.

3. The only other alternative is that the works which are condemned in Tit 3:4-7 are those which are devised and executed by man. This is obtained by the process of elimination detailed above. However, even without this reasoning, the plain reading of the passage in its context indicates this.

Before leaving this passage, let us continue to the very next verse (Tit 3:8): "[This is] a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men." Why should we be careful to maintain good works if they have nothing to do with our salvation. "These things are good and profitable unto men" because they lead to our salvation. It is never counterproductive to obey God!

Calvin knew that we could not have it both ways. Either there are conditions to salvation or there are none. If there are any conditions of salvation at all, then we must observe all that God has set forth as conditions. Why do we recognize faith to be a condition of salvation without recognizing repentance. If we recognize repentance, why not confession? And if any of these, they why not baptism? Indeed, baptism is stated to be a condition of entry into Christ and His kingdom several times as often as these other conditions. At least Calvin was consistent when he renounced all conditions of salvation and declared that we are saved by the irresistible grace of God which is totally beyond our control. The same reasoning applies to Eph 2:8-9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Condemned are the works originated by man. The works of God which we do by faith are not of ourselves, they are of God. We cannot boast about keeping God's commandments and still keep them (this is an oxymoron). Again, when we read on we find that the very purpose of this admonition is to prompt us to walk in the works of God (Eph 2:10): "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Let us conclude by adjusting the syllogism with which we opened this section:

1. Major premise: Salvation is conditioned on commands which originated in the mind of God, 2. Minor premise: Scriptural baptism is a commanded operation of God which originated in the mind of God; therefore
3. Conclusion: Scriptural baptism is essential to our salvation in that a failure to comply with this simple act clearly demonstrates a lack of faith in His promises.

04.03.02 - The Thief on the Cross

4.3.2 THE THIEF ON THE CROSS The reasoning applied is given by the following syllogism:

1. Major premise: If one "exception to baptism" can be found, then baptism cannot possibly be essential to salvation, 2. Minor premise: The thief on the cross is an exception; therefore 3. Conclusion: Baptism cannot possibly be essential to salvation. By "exception to baptism" we mean that someone is stated to be saved who has clearly not been baptized. While the above syllogism is logically correct, we will show that the minor premise is clearly false, and therefore the conclusion does not follow.

First, however, it does us well to examine the major premise. Those who make the argument based upon the thief on the cross do so in full recognition that they cannot identify one other individual in the New Testament who was stated to have been saved who had not allowed himself or herself to be subjected to scriptural baptism. This itself is very powerful evidence in favor of baptism being a condition of salvation, especially if the argument based upon the thief is not valid.

We also wish to state emphatically that we recognize that ultimate judgment rests with God. If God wants to make an exception, then in His infinite wisdom and mercy, He certainly has the right to. Our intent is not to put God in a box -- it is to better understand and teach what He has stated in the New Testament. Those who teach others to stake their salvation on the thief on the cross need to study this closely and determine if they are not going beyond the doctrine of Christ (2Jn 1:9: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.")

Let us begin our study by reviewing the scriptures which record the event of concern. It is given in Luk 23:39-43: "And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, dost thou not fear God, seeing that thou are in the same condemnation? and we indeed justly, for we received the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Let us take this last sentence to mean that Jesus wanted both the penitent thief and us to know that the thief was saved. We feel that this is the most reasonable meaning of "today shalt thou be with me in paradise." Further, we agree that if the thief was baptized at all it would probably have been by the authority of John the baptist. Jesus' disciples baptized (see John 3:23-30, John 4:1-2), but this was not the same as that commanded on Pentecost, because Jesus had not yet died on the cross. This proves the point. If baptism were a requirement prior to the death of Jesus on the cross, then there is no evidence that the thief was not baptized by Jesus' disciples. But it was not a requirement. There is no evidence in the New Testament that anyone was "baptized into Christ" prior to the day of Pentecost (which is recorded in Acts 2:1-47). Those who lived prior to Jesus death on the cross lived under the Old Testament law, and baptism was not part of the Old

Testament law. Thus, the specific terms of salvation of the thief on the cross is irrelevant to the terms of our salvation today.

If we are going to use figures who lived under the Old Testament law to make exceptions to those conditions of salvation which God has established for us today, then we could use Noah or Abraham. While, in general, God expects the same faithfulness of us as he does of them (God is no respecter of persons), yet we demonstrate this faithfulness in completely different ways. It would not be a demonstration of faith on my part today to build an ark or to offer my son as a sacrifice to God. Yet, if these men failed to do that they would not be listed in Heb 11:1-40 as men of faith.

It is easy to be sidetracked into simplistic explanations which support preconceived ideas. Let us restate the accurate syllogism that applies:

1. Major premise: If one "exception to baptism" can be found, then baptism cannot possibly be essential to salvation,
2. Minor premise: The thief on the cross is not an exception since he did not live under the New Testament and neither are there any exceptions after the day of pentecost which is recorded in Acts 2:1-47; therefore
3. Conclusion: Baptism is essential to salvation.

If this conclusion does not follow then our entry into Christ is different from those in the first century, as we saw in Section 4.2 above. If this were the case there would be something in the New Testament to this effect. In the absence of it, we cannot go beyond God's word in our teaching.

04.03.03 - Paul Not Sent to Baptize

4.3.3 PAUL NOT SENT TO BAPTIZE

Endless bogus arguments can be made by taking verses out of context. A classic example of this is 1Co 1:17: "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." Was Paul stating that baptism was of secondary importance? ... that it was not a command? If so, this would be quite contradictory to the dozens of passages which were presented in Section 4.2. However, there is no contradiction. When we place this passage in its context we see exactly what Paul was trying to say, and it does not de-emphasize baptism in any way. To show this, let us first consider the entire context (1Co 1:10-17):

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and [that] there be no divisions among you; but [that] ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them [which are of the house] of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. This is a very informative and enlightening passage which has little to do with the doctrine of baptism. Let us analyze it in detail to see exactly what Paul was trying to communicate to the Corinthians:

1. First, the subject is not baptism, it is division. Clearly, the Corinthians were denominating -- they were dividing the church and calling these different groups by distinctly different names. It is interesting that calling a denomination after Paul was condemned even though Paul was an apostle and his inspired writings and speech had the full weight of the commandments of Christ (1Co 14:37: "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord"). But then, even those who claimed "I am of Christ" for the purpose of making distinctions within the Lord's church were condemned for this.

2. "Is Christ divided?" This rhetorical question would be answered in the affirmative by denominationalists. The obvious answer is no; Christ is not divided. The body of Christ is not divided. At some point when such divisions arise the organization so divided ceases to be the body of Christ.

3. "... was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" This begins to get at the context of the 17th verse which is at issue here. These rhetorical questions necessarily infer that the readers, the Corinthian Christians, were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and not in

the name of Paul. Thus, they should only call themselves Christians (1Pe 4:16) and not Paulites or any other name to distinguish themselves from one another. This does not diminish the importance of baptism in any way. In fact, the very mention of it in this context emphasizes its importance as the act which distinguishes Christians from those of the world.

4. "I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other." This is a statement of frustration on the part of Paul, since it is evident that the Corinthians were calling themselves and dividing themselves over those who had baptized them. Who baptizes you is not important. The important thing is that it is done in obedience to (in the name of) Jesus Christ. The fact that Paul cannot remember who he baptized further illustrates this point -- whether a person were baptized by Paul or some other Christian has no relevance to that person's salvation!

5. "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel ..." The role of the apostle Paul was preach the new truth that was specifically given to him through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit -- the gospel of Christ. Any Christian could baptize, it did not take an apostle to do that. And there was always the danger of someone trying to exalt themselves by saying that they were baptized by the apostle Paul. (Perhaps this is the reason that Jesus did not baptize -- John 4:2.) Thus, there was probably an advantage to Paul avoiding the performance of baptisms.

6. "... not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." This does not relate to baptism. It introduces a contrast between the "word of the cross" and the "wisdom of words" which is another expression for the wisdom of man. This subject continues through the end of Chapter 4. In summary, the context clearly shows that the apostle Paul was not trying to de-emphasize baptism, he was trying to de-emphasize the baptizer.

04.03.04 - Conversions Which Do Not Mention Baptism

4.3.4 CONVERSIONS WHICH DO NOT MENTION BAPTISM

We stated that every detailed case of conversion included the specific mention of baptism as the culminating act which put the convert into Christ. There are a few conversions in which baptism is not explicitly mentioned. Let us consider these to determine if this creates authority for us to place baptism into the secondary role which it has assumed in the denominational world today. Since all of the cases of conversion are in the book of Acts, all we need to do is scour this book to find them. The first such situation is given in Acts 11:19-21: "Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." This is certainly not a detailed case of conversion. "Believed" and "turned to the Lord" are general terms which infer that they (in the words of John the baptist -- Mat 3:8) "brought forth fruits worthy of repentance." What does it mean, "believed" and they "turned to the Lord." The only way that we can tell is to examine others who believed and turned to the Lord and examine what they did. This is what we did when we examined the detailed cases of conversion given above.

Acts 13:12 presents another case: "Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord." Again, a living faith is one which motivates the convert to be obedient to God's will.

While the above two passages do not pose any great difficulty, the next occurrence does. We place it in its context (Acts 13:44-48): And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, [saying], I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. The last verse infers that because they were ordained to eternal life, they believed. However, this is not a necessary inference. It could equally be read: as many as believed were ordained to eternal life. Of course, there is a sense in which faith is a gift of God in that if God had not revealed His word to us, we would not have faith (Rom 10:17). However, God has made this gift available to all people of all nations -- "whosoever will may come" (Rev 22:17).

Again in Acts 14:1 we have a situation which is not detailed: "And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both

of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed." Recognize that there is no inference that these people did not hear, repent, confess or subject themselves to baptism. The fact that it says that they believed is not evidence that they were saved by faith only any more than a statements of cases of baptism infer that they were saved by baptism only. Since repentance, confession and baptism are motivated by faith, a statement that they believed infers that they performed these simple acts of faithful obedience. And, just a few verses (Acts 14:22) later Paul and Barnabas are said to be "Confirming the souls of the disciples, [and] exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." It is not enough to just "begin in the faith;" we must also "continue in the faith."

Another set of non-detailed cases of conversions is given in Acts 17:10-12: "And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming [thither] went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few." Their faith, in this case, is attributable to their searching the scriptures to assure that the teachings of the apostle Paul were correct. No details with regard to these teachings are presented in this general case of conversion. The New Testament scriptures, however, adequately furnish with all of these teachings as well as all others that we need so that we can understand "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2Pe 1:3).

Another case is given in Acts 17:32-34: "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this [matter]. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which [was] Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them."

Another interesting case demonstrates that the impersonation of the miraculous allegedly in the name of Jesus is nothing new. It is also one of the most humorous stories in the New Testament (Acts 19:13-20):

Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of [one] Sceva, a Jew, [and] chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all [men]: and they counted the price of them, and found [it] fifty thousand [pieces] of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

Each case of conversion illustrates a different component of salvation. In this case the aspect emphasized is repentance, and it is illustrated by the way in which these people separated themselves from their past sins. This is not done to de-emphasize any other of God's commands. When we put all of the scriptures together we get the entire picture of what God wants us to do and be (Mat 4:4).

One final example of baptism not being mentioned is quite enlightening. Consider Acts 26:24-29, which occurred after a rather lengthy sermon which Paul preached to Festus and King Agrippa: And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

King Agrippa believed; Paul said "I know that thou believest." He gave the reason: "For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner." But this was the same type of belief that James spoke of when he said: "the demons also believe, and tremble" (Jas 2:19). It is a dead faith -- faith devoid of any actions to demonstrate that it exists. This returns to the subject of Chapter 3. The statement that someone believes infers that that person is obedient to God. Denominational teachers would have us believe that it necessarily implies just the opposite. They would have us believe that because the above cases of conversion do not mention other acts of obedience that this necessarily implies that these acts of obedience are not required. Some (admittedly extremists) go so far as to teach that any performance of such acts are sinful and will preclude a person from salvation.

What should we teach? Should we ignore all of the cases of conversion as well as the teachings of Jesus and the apostles (many of which are documented in Section 4.2 above)? Are we going to allow those cases where Luke recorded that people "believed" to set all of these teaching aside? Or are we going to believe that the bible is inconsistent? Consistency demands that the statement that certain individuals believed infers that they were obedient to whatever commands of God that they knew and understood. If there is any doubt at all about this, reread Heb 11:1-40.

04.03.05 - If a Person Got Killed on the Way to Baptism...

4.3.5 IF A PERSON GOT KILLED ON THE WAY TO HIS BAPTISM ...

One of the most persuasive arguments against the necessity of baptism has nothing to do with scriptural argumentation. It is launched with a single definitive emotional argument: "Do you mean that someone was on the way to their baptism and got killed that they would be lost."

Actually, I don't. But what I believe is of little consequence to anyone but me. It is what the bible teaches that counts. Since the bible does not deal with this exceptional circumstance, neither can we state anything definitively on it. The bible never gives an example of where a person believes and is on the way to render obedience to God in baptism and gets killed; thus, it does not specifically tell us God's judgment on such a case. The problem, however, is not what opinions that we hold with regard to this hypothetical case. There are many such hypotheticals which the bible does not detail for us. For us to draw conclusions and base doctrine on these is clearly going beyond that which is written, and it is condemned (1 John 9). That is the problem. For an entire body of doctrine is based upon the following syllogism:

1. Major premise: If one circumstance which constitutes an "exception to baptism" can be found, then baptism cannot possibly be essential to salvation, 2. Minor premise: A person who is killed while on their way to being baptized is saved; therefore 3. Conclusion: Baptism is not essential to salvation.

Let us determine if this is sound reasoning.

First, consider the major premise. This is an assumption of legalism which those opposed to baptism would never espouse unless it served their own ends. In reality, God has the full right to make exceptions as He sees fit (which, in reality, would be both perfectly righteous and just). That is not the point. The point is that we have absolutely no right to make such exceptions and base doctrines upon them. Thus, there is no guarantee that the major premise is true. We might dream up any number of reasons that God might under some special circumstance not require baptism (such as the total absence of sufficient water). Admittedly such are far fetched, and we are not teaching that God does allow them as exceptions. We are only stating that the fact that He would does not mean that the rest of us who are not subject to these exceptions are free from those requirements that we can meet.

Consider as a real example given in Rom 10:9: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." If a person does not have a voice, he cannot possibly be able to confess Jesus with his mouth. This person would not be lost. However, this does not in any way alter our responsibility to confess Jesus with the mouth. Can we refuse to confess Christ because those who are prevented from it are excused? Such logic is totally unreasonable when applied to confession. What makes it any more logical when applied to baptism?

Now let us turn to the minor premise: A person who is killed while on their way to being baptized is saved. There is no assurance that this is true. The fact that we believe it does not make it true. We saw that the bible teaches several steps prior to the act which puts the believer into Christ. Baptism must be preceded by hearing, belief, repentance and confession of belief that Jesus is the Son of God. It would be equally valid to apply this reasoning to any of these steps: A person who is killed while on his way to confessing, repentance, belief, hearing ... where do we draw the line?

Suppose a person is killed on their way to attending gospel preaching in which Jesus will be preached and they would render full obedience to the gospel and be saved. Is that person saved? If so, does this mean that there is no need to hear the gospel preached? As the old wise man once said: "That's whittling on God's end of the stick." If God wishes to make exceptions, that is His business. I cannot teach such because the bible does not teach any. We believe in the perfect justice and the perfect grace of God. I do not need to get into the business of Gods judgment in order to preach the word of God. I just need to state what the bible has said with as much love as I can. This we have done as best we can by presenting the teachings of the New Testament in Section 4.2 above. The convoluted logic of this section does not set that aside. Rather, it is an attempt of those whose worldly interests are best served from such deceit.

Since neither the major nor the minor premises can be determined to be true, the conclusion can certainly not be inferred or proven in any way. The bible teaches that baptism is essential to salvation and to teach otherwise constitutes the gravest disservice that we can render our fellow man.

04.04 - Is This Important?

4.4 IS THIS IMPORTANT?

We hardly believe that you would have read to this point if you did not believe that this is important. However, it is not the misunderstanding of God's word that is the greatest enemy of the truth. It is the pure complacency that most people have for scriptural doctrine. They reason: "As long as I am a good person, isn't that enough? The bible, after all, is just common sense. I am a loving person and that is what God really wants." This is not the reasoning of an evil person. But it is the reasoning of one who feels that he or she is justified by works. Being a good, loving person is not enough. We all need the blood of Christ for our justification. The terms and conditions for having that blood wash away our sins are set by God, not man. These are clearly presented in the scriptures referenced above. Those who think this is a skewed presentation should read the entire New Testament for themselves. Those who agree should also be skeptical and verify not only that truthful conclusions are being taught, but also that scriptures are being applied properly and truthfully.

Please review this chapter and as you do recognize that baptism is not the issue here! The issue is faith in God and His word. Do we believe what he said or don't we? Are we going to take Him at His word, or aren't we? Baptism is easy. It requires virtually no effort on our part. It is an arbitrary thing. Those who are going to associate with some church are going to be baptized at some time in some way and for some reason. Why not do it God's way and for God's reasons? If we cannot practice scriptural baptism in all of its simplicity, what can we practice? If we refuse to follow God's will on this simple thing, what is going to happen in those moral issues which require tremendous faith on our part? When we look at the collective morality of our country, we must ask: Is our slide into immorality caused by the same refusal to obey God that leads us to accept this myth of denominationalism instead of regarding baptism with the importance that God gave it? In the next chapter we discuss another myth that so often diverts attention away from God's word and toward subjective self-direction: the idea that love is all you need.

05 - Myth 5: Love is All You Need

CHAPTER 5 MYTH 5: ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

05.01 - Do We Love?

5.1 DO WE LOVE? The saying "all you need is love" is very popular, even finding its way into some of our popular songs. If it were interpreted strictly according to the biblical definition of love, it would be true. However, no one would state that "all you need is love" if they thoroughly understood and were trying to convey the biblical definition. This is because the expression necessarily implies that there is something else that is not needed. Why would someone state: "all you need is love" if they were not trying to imply that some other requirement of God is not important? We shall see that this is an act of hatred. Thus, like faith only, love only is an oxymoron. But let us not get ahead of ourselves or convey the wrong impression. Love is by far the most important motivator in the life of a Christian. Jesus responded to a question as to what is the greatest law (Mat 22:37-40): "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." These were commands of the Old Testament law (Deu 6:5, Lev 19:18), which was the law under which Jesus lived. However, it is clear from the teaching of Christ, the practice of the early church as recorded in the book of Acts, and the letters to the churches that this law was not only brought into the New Testament, it was greatly enlarged upon (see Section 5.3).

Love is such an important concept that it formed the center point of the New Testament. In concluding his Chapter on love, the apostle Paul stated (1Co 13:13): "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these [is] love." Jesus is cited as the example in this regard (Rom 5:6-8): "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The ultimate unrequited love of a sinful people was demonstrated by Jesus when He died on the cross. When we answer the question "do we love?" we need to do so in light of the definition of love given to us by the suffering of Jesus. When we see men and women in our society unable to even love their children, their husbands and wives, their fellow church members and their close acquaintances, we must conclude that something is drastically wrong with the religious base which declares: "all you need is love!" The major portion of our society does not even know what the word means in the biblical sense. A large plurality, if not a majority, have seen the word so exploited in our modern story-telling culture (i.e., movies and TV) that they associate it almost exclusively with erotic or romantic relationships. Our society and the world is paying the price for this ignorance of God's word.

Let us begin by allowing the bible to define the biblical usage of the word "love" that we use in the English language. Then we will explore the extensions of love which the New Testament has made so that we can better apply these definitions. At that point we will look at what the bible teaches on making love an integral part of our lives -- making love a reality. Then we will look at the natural effects of love and determine if these exist in our society and in our churches today. Finally, we summarize by returning once again to the question: can we be saved by love only?

05.02 - Love Defined

5.2 LOVE DEFINED

We will begin with the technical Greek definitions, since without these it is impossible to distinguish between the different Greek words that are interpreted to our English word love. However, a knowledge of the Greek is not necessary, since the bible itself defines love quite adequately; that will be considered in Section 5.2.2.

05.02.01 - Greek Definitions

5.2.1 GREEK DEFINITIONS

There are two Greek New Testament words which are translated to our English word love: agapao and phileo. We can obtain a distinction between these two words by contrasting their use in the New Testament. Let us begin with agape (verb: agapao), which is the love that is commanded of Christians by God. As such, it is more of a reasoned love, not one which proceeds out of the emotions or that is necessarily provoked by the actions of others. Let us examine some of its uses in the New Testament:

AGAPE/AGAPAO

John 17:25-26: Jesus praying with his disciples: "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare [it]: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." That love was the love of reason.

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God had this same type of love for us that he had for His son. It was this love that motivated Him to send Jesus into the world so that we could be saved.

Rom 5:8: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This brings out the aspect of it being unwarranted and unprovoked. In this case it was totally without any merit on our part; God loved us despite the fact that we had the general mind to crucify His son.

John 13:34: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." This illustrates that agape love is that which is commanded of God. It also indicates that under the New Testament the quality of our love should change (i.e., a new commandment). We will discuss the aspect further below.

1Th 3:12-13: "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all [men], even as we [do] toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." This type of love is attributable to God. That is, He assists us in acquiring it, and without this assistance we are not capable of acquiring it. Note also that the end of this love is to be "unblamable in holiness."

1Jn 4:8-12: "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is

perfected in us." This type of love so characterizes God that John said "God is love" (agape). As Christians, this is what we are to become. It is the love which God "naturally" possesses; it is a love that must be acquired by man. We acquire this love only in the recognition of what God has done for us.

2Co 5:14-15: "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And [that] he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." This is the transformation introduced in the previous passage.

Eph 5:2: "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour." This command pictures love not as a feeling but as a "walk." The goal, which is never reached is "as Christ also hath loved us."

Rom 13:8-10: "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if [there be] any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love [is] the fulfilling of the law." This is agape. It is not a good feeling toward everyone -- it is an attitude which desires the wellbeing of everyone. There is a significant difference between these two.

PHILEO The use of this word indicates tender affection, more from the emotions than from the reason. It never appears in the New Testament as a command. However, neither is it discouraged. It appears that it is the normal affection which develops when we have close associations with those whose presence we enjoy. This is the relationship which also develops as we learn more about Jesus and enjoy His fellowship. Thus, the apostle Paul warns Christians who do not have this type of relationship (1Co 16:22): "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha." Clearly, phileo is not only encouraged, it is expected. The problem is that phileo is not under our control as is agape. We cannot turn on and off our emotions. We can express kindness, for example, without it being motivated out of a concern for others. Phileo is sometimes translated kindness, indicating a deep concern for the wellbeing of others. An example is in Acts 28:2: "And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold."

While the love which God has for man is most often described using Agape, this is not exclusively the case. Consider Tit 3:4-5: "But after that the kindness and love [phileo] of God our Saviour toward man appeared ... he saved us ..." (We have discussed this verse elsewhere, so in this case we have omitted that part not relevant to the meaning of phileo.) Since God has this love for man, it would seem only appropriate that we respond in kind. In fact, both agapao and phileo are used to describe several relationships: the love of the Father for the Son (John 3:35; John 5:20); the love of God for the believer (John 14:21; John 16:27), and Christ's love for certain of His disciples (John 13:23; John 20:2). (In all cases the first reference is agapao while the second is phileo). This overlap between the two types of love might seem confusing, but not if we recognize that God has, and wants us to have both types of love. From the fact that agape is commanded, we must conclude that it takes priority both in time and in importance. In time, since generally we love with our head before the love of the heart and emotions develops. In importance, since unless we love

with our reason the love of the heart can lead us to do things which are counterproductive to those who we love. This is brought out by Jesus' discourse with Peter after His resurrection but before His ascension into heaven, which is recorded in John 21:15-17: "So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, [son] of Jonas, lovest (agapao) thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love (phileo) thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, [son] of Jonas, lovest (agapao) thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love (phileo) thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, [son] of Jonas, lovest (phileo) thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest (phileo) thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love (phileo) thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep." The implication is that Jesus was inquiring with regard to the primary love of reason which is commanded of all Christians. Following his normal impulsive pattern, Peter's response was to go a step further and indicate that the affection that he had for Jesus was superior even to that which Jesus was inquiring about. This would have been an accurate assessment had Peter's love begun with the love of reason which would have led him to do the Lord's will, which in this case was exemplified by the command "Feed my lambs." To show Peter his deficiency, Jesus asked the question again, still using agapao. Peter, not known for his ability to "get it" the first time, responded as he had before. The third time Jesus provoked Peter by questioning not his agapao but his phileo -- effectively: "Do you really have the affection and feelings for me that you claim?" Peter was so convinced that he had what he felt that he had that he appealed directly to the knowledge of the Lord: "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love (phileo) thee." Again Jesus command: "Feed my sheep" had the impact of questioning Peter's motivation for going back to his occupation of fishing -- effectively: "If you love me so much, what are you doing fishing when you should be feeding my sheep?"

We state readily that this is based on implication. Clearly Jesus meant to draw a distinction between the two types of love, and this would seem to be a reasonable explanation. Other explanations which we have heard bring out the same conclusion. Jesus wants phileo, but he wants agape first. Unless we have our behavior under the control of our reason and are indeed acting in the best interest of others (or God), the "feeling" love may not be on target. In fact, it could be leading us to do things which are not loving at all. Feelings are funny things, which we will consider in detail in Chapter 7.

We dare not belabor the distinction between agape and phileo, since it is not at all critical to the point of this chapter. When the Greek word used makes a difference in our interpretation, we will put it in parenthesis as we did above. It is the biblical definition of love which is critical, and that is what we will take up next.

05.02.02 - Bibleical Definitions

5.2.2 BIBLICAL DEFINITIONS

There are several equivalent definitions of love given in the New Testament. None is more succinct than 1Jn 5:5: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." Clearly this definition requires that we know all of the commands of God and that we do our best to apply them to every aspect of our lives. This is not the definition which is generally applied by those who would believe that we can ignore God's word and just practice love.

There are two aspects of this definition. First, is the keeping of God's commands, which requires us to both know them and exert the effort to either perform them or abstain from sin. But as important as the raw keeping of those commands is the recognition that God established them out of love for us. Thus, "his commands are not grievous." Grievous means heavy or burdensome to the person who is obedient to those commands. We might view the statement "and his commandments are not grievous" in two possible ways:

1. As a statement of fact. This is validated by Jesus in Mat 11:28-30: "Come unto me, all [ye] that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke [is] easy, and my burden is light." It is a fact that obedience to the commands of God is the best possible life that anyone can live. His commands are not grievous, and unless we believe this we cannot possibly love God while keeping his commands. In fact, if we view his commands to be grievous we will despise God for denying us of the things which the world values so highly.

2. As a condition. This views the definition of love as a compound condition: (1) to keep His commandments, and (2) that those commands are not grievous. If this be the case, then we could fail to love God even while doing His commands if our heart was not in it because we failed to recognize them as being the result of God's love for us.

Either interpretation leads to the same conclusion. To demonstrate our love for God we must not only do His commandments but we must also possess a heart which recognizes the value that those commands are to us, both in this world and in the world to come. The value in the world to come is due to the price that Jesus paid for us with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

Love is adequately defined as non-grievous obedience to God's law. This was emphasized by Jesus in a number of places. One example is John 14:21-24 "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me."

Again, in John 15:9-11: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and [that] your joy might be full."

It is clear from the biblical definition of love that we can easily deceive ourselves into thinking that we love God and our fellow man while not keeping His commandments. Indeed, very few people in this world do not consider themselves to be loving people. Yet, great atrocities are done in the name of love. The words of Jesus above seem to warn us that if we feel that we love but do not keep His commandments, we are deceiving ourselves.

While this proves the point that intuitive love is not what pleases God, we will now present some other biblical teachings on the subject of love that further reinforce this truth.

05.03 - Old Testament Love Extended

5.3 OLD TESTAMENT LOVE EXTENDED The sermon on the mount is probably the most counterintuitive lesson ever preached. Jesus began with the beatitudes, each of which contains its own surprise. It was as if Jesus was trying to get their attention by saying: "What I have for you is as far from your intuitive feelings as you can get." Jesus touched on the subject of love near the middle of this sermon (Mat 5:43-47): "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more [than others]? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." This certainly extends love beyond its reasonably accepted intuitive limits. "Love your enemies" is a command and, as such, it helps to define agape love as something which we can control, and something which will, at times, have to go against our feelings. The "publicans" were tax collectors, who most often were paid according to how much they could extract. They were cited because of the general hatred that the common person had for them. Yet, these men, as hateful as they were, still exhibited love for their families and friends. God's people are to possess a degree of love which is far beyond that which people have naturally. Having the best interests of those who hate us is essential to carrying out the great commission. At the same time that Jesus extended the love that Christians are to have for their enemies, He also extended the love that they are to have for each other (John 13:34-35): "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all [men] know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." How is this command new? We know that both loving God and loving our neighbor were commanded in the Old Testament. Yet this is a new command. It can only be new in its degree: "as I have loved you." Indeed the love that Jesus had for us was much different in degree than that possessed by men. Consider Rom 5:6-11: For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only [so], but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Jesus' love for us is totally unconditional. He desires and pleads for us to accept what He has for us. It is only our own rejection of Him that keeps us from availing ourselves of His saving power. This defines what it means to love "as I have loved you." We might plead that such love is not possible for us ordinary mortals. However, if God expects us to be able to love our enemies, surely

for us to possess such love for our fellow Christians is not the least bit unreasonable. In fact this is essential to our evangelistic effort: "By this shall all [men] know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Not by our knowledge, moral excellence or purity of speech; although the absence of things will certainly declare that we are not His disciples. But the knowledge that we are his disciples can only accrue to unbelievers if we truly have love one for another.

Some additional scriptures which indicate the counterintuitive nature of love are given in the following paragraphs.

Biblical love of our brother includes discipline (2Th 3:14-15): "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count [him] not as an enemy, but admonish [him] as a brother." Keeping God's commandments in this regard is an act of love. In fact, a failure to do so contributes not only to his own departure from the Lord, but it also allows reproach to be brought upon the church (see 1Co 5:1-13).

Biblical love is not judgmental (Jas 4:11-12): "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of [his] brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?" The difference between "speaking evil" and legitimate disciplinary action is detailed in Mat 18:15-17. As a final counterintuitive aspect of love, like our Lord, we are not to have respect of persons (Acts 10:34). This is made quite clear in Jas 2:1-10: "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, [the Lord] of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one [point], he is guilty of all." Those who feel that they have no weakness in this regard have lost touch with reality.

05.04 - Making Love a Reality

5.4 MAKING LOVE A REALITY

First and foremost, our love for each other must start with God. Mat 22:37-38 is still the greatest law, and the love of God comes first. There are many organizations which are established purely for the benefit of the members, and where the members act in (their perception of) each other's interests at all costs. In these organizations love (of one another) becomes the god, harmony becomes the idol and compromise the rule. "Love is all you need" is practiced, but it is not the love of the New Testament.

Love begins with God, since God is the source of all love. Without a knowledge of God, we cannot love our fellow man. But how do we increase our love for God? The beginning of love for God begins with an appreciation of ourselves. In Psa 139:14 David said: "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully [and] wonderfully made." David's assessment of himself is not what is currently called "self esteem," for that carries with it the excess baggage of pride. As an aside, many of the current programs to instill self esteem in our children through the public educational system are destined to fail because they ignore God. Some day these children will have to enter the real world, and when they find out that they are not the center of the universe we can expect the suicide rate to skyrocket. I did not make myself fearfully and wonderfully -- no, I am fearfully and wonderfully made by the God whom I love.

David was not proud that he was fearfully and wonderfully made, but he recognized it. He recognized it when he was a lonely shepherd -- when most men would have complained about living out on the pastures, the terrors of wild animals, the heat of the day and the cold of the night. He recognized it when he was hunted by Saul. And he recognized it when, due to his own sin, his own family turned against him. David had plenty of things to complain about. He could have (wrongfully) blamed God for any of his problems, as many people do. But through it all, he maintained an attitude of thankfulness for what God made him. It seems strange that those who have the least of this world's blessings are often the ones who are the first to proclaim: I have been fearfully and wonderfully made! Yet, this is the beginning of our love for God. For, what are we doing when we complain and murmur other than demonstrating our hatred for what God has done for us? It is no wonder that God dealt so harshly with murmuring in the Old Testament times.

If having an appreciation of self is the beginning of our love for God, the cultivation of it is through fellowship. Fellowship with God and our fellow Christians is defined in 1Jn 1:7: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." The only way that we can grow close to one another according to God's will, is for us to walk in the light. When we have common fellowship with God, we will have fellowship with one another. Conversely, when we fail to continue walking in the light we can expect divisions and all kinds of organizational problems despite the many efforts which will be made to create good relationships between our fellow Christians. This further reinforces the fact that the love which is commanded of us in the New Testament is subject to our will. We can

choose to do God's will for us (walk in the light) or not. When we do, our love for God increases as does our desire to continue doing his will.

05.05 - Can We be Saved by Love Only?

5.5 CAN WE BE SAVED BY LOVE ONLY?

We made it clear above that when you place the word only behind even the noblest of actions of motives, it changes the entire meaning. We are saved by faith, but not by faith only. We are saved by obedience, but not by obedience only. It can also be said that we are saved by love. If we have love, it covers a multitude of sins (1Pe 4:8). Paul indicated that love is greater than faith (1Co 13:13): "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these [is] love." But can we say: "all we need is love?"

Love is intangible. It is a motive. Having the best interests of God and others is an essential emotion. However, by itself it is only in the imagination. If it exists as the New Testament teaches that it should exist, then it will manifest itself in outward actions. As with true faith, it cannot exist without works. Thus "all you need is love" is a contradiction in terms.

If the speaker means the type of love defined in the New Testament, then why say that this is "all you need?" What is excluded? What do we not need? On the other hand, if the speaker is intentionally trying to infer that we do not need to pay any attention to God's other commands, then this is not the love defined by the New Testament.

LIST OF SCRIPTURES WHERE LOVE IS USED BY GREEK WORD Let us begin with the word agape (verb: agapao), which appears in the following scriptures: agapao

John 17:26

John 3:16

Rom 5:8

John 14:21

John 13:34

1Th 3:12

1Co 16:14

2Pe 1:7 1Jn 4:8-10, 1Jn 4:16 2Co 5:14; Eph 2:4; Eph 3:19; Eph 5:2

Gal 5:22 John 14:15, John 14:21, John 14:23, John 15:10 1Jn 2:5; 1Jn 5:3; 2Jn 1:6 Rom 15:2; Rom 13:8-10; Gal 6:10; 1Co 13:1-13; Col 3:12-14 philanthropia -- love for man (verb: phileo) -- tender affection; never as a command as a warning: 1Co 16:22

Acts 28:2

Tit 3:4

BOTH ARE USED

John 21:15-17 BOTH ARE USED (agapao; phileo): love of father for son (John 3:35; John 5:20)
God for the believer (John 14:21; John 16:27) Christ's love for certain disciples (John 13:23; John 20:2)

06 - Myth 6: The Rapture, The RAPTURE, THE RAPTURE

CHAPTER 6 MYTH 6: THE RAPTURE, THE RAPTURE, THE RAPTURE!

06.01 - A Most Popular Doctrine

6.1 A MOST POPULAR DOCTRINE Of all of the false doctrines from which we had to choose, this one had the most popularity associated with it. For that reason our first inclination was to avoid undue prejudice by not even discussing it. However, the more that we learn about denominational teachings on the rapture, the more we are convinced that (1) it is becoming the central drawing card of denominationalism, and (2) it is one of the most vulnerable doctrines in that it is totally without scriptural basis. Thus, it would be somewhat cowardly to dodge it just because it is so popular. A problem arises when attempting to deal with this doctrine, since it is impossible to pin down. Not having a scriptural foundation, those who are prone to bind their speculations each have a different twist, so there are as many variations on the rapture teachings as there are false teachers to expound it. This tends to get quite frustrating when attempting to address the issues raised by it. The author has made every attempt to ascertain the scriptures which are alleged to prove the general theory of premillennialism, and the ones given will be addressed in this chapter. However, it has been our observation that the false teachers prey more on their disciples ignorance of the New Testament than they do on their knowledge of it. A scripture which indeed deals with the second coming of Christ is read, but the conclusions drawn have little relevance to that scripture. For example, recently we were watching a popular religious TV program where it was stated that definitive biblical proof of the rapture would be given. The only proof text given, however, was John 14:1-3:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if [it were] not [so], I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, [there] ye may be also. From this all kinds of detail were surmised with regard to Jesus coming, the removal of the saints from the world for a short time, a second appearance, etc., etc. In fact, the preacher did not even present the clear truth taught in John 14:1-3; he just asserted his imagination as to how things ought to be.

Now we are hasty to admit that just because one (or a million) false teacher(s) do something obviously wrong, does not disprove their entire set of doctrines. In fact, very few false teachers manage to get it all wrong. However, it is this type of speculative binding of the imaginary that takes the emphasis away from the very clear doctrines on the moral aspects of the individual Christian life and the true work of the Lord's church. For, as long as we are engaged in speculation, we have little interest in learning the truth -- indeed we tend to ridicule it as being intuitive and trivial.

Since there are so many variation of rapture and 1000-year-reign doctrines, we cannot possibly hope to address them all. However, this is not necessary. In this chapter we will present all of the scriptures which we have found that deal with the second coming of Jesus. The intent is to determine exactly what will happen when that event occurs. We will address only one aspect of the doctrine, as expressed by the following question: will Jesus come to this earth at some time in

the future and establish a literal kingdom which will last for 1000 years?

Premillennialists generally teach that this is the case, and most of them further assert that this kingdom will be a restoration of the literal kingdom of Israel centered at Jerusalem. But we dare go no further for fear that someone will deny some of the details that we might attribute to the belief. No matter; premillennialism rises and falls on whether the bible supports the concept of Jesus coming back to earth to establish a literal kingdom. If we demonstrate that this is a false doctrine, it will subject all such speculation to further investigation. Hopefully, this will lead many to recognize that we do not need to add to God's word for whatever reason (2Jn 1:9).

06.02 - A Proposed Scenario

6.2 A PROPOSED SCENARIO

There will be a large number of scriptures presented below -- in fact all that we know which related to the events surrounding the second coming of Jesus and the judgment. (If we have omitted any which in any way changes our conclusions, we seek your help and pledge to make corrections.) We recognize that there are a wide range of false teachings which might exist in many readers' minds which will be contradicted by these scriptures. This section presents a simple scenario which will not be contradicted. We present it here without scriptural reference. However, as the scriptures are presented below, we will determine whether or not it is true. Do not accept it as reality at this point, but test it against the scriptural references presented to determine for yourself if it is valid.

First let us define what we mean by the second coming (also translated presence) of Jesus. This is important for we have not found this term used in the New Testament. We define Jesus' first coming as being when He was born of a virgin and lived for thirty some-odd years in human form on this earth, about 2000 years ago. His physical life was ended by a brutal crucifixion. However, he was resurrected and appeared to many people for 40 days, after which he ascended into heaven. While on this earth he promised on many occasions that he would come again. We will see that while the commonly popular "second coming" terminology does not appear in the New Testament, the identical concept is conveyed by Jesus terminology in John 14:3, which we quoted above: " And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself ..." The synopsis of this second coming is based upon these promises as well as the revelation given to the apostles which are written in the New Testament. The proposed scenario of the second coming of Jesus which we will evaluate is as follows:

1. Jesus' second coming could be at any time and we should always be ready for it.
2. Jesus' imminent physical recognition (presence) will be signalled by the voice of an archangel and the trumpet of heaven. It will be an event that is obvious to all people on the earth.
3. Jesus will appear in the clouds.
4. This will be followed almost immediately by a general resurrection of both the just and the unjust.
5. The righteous dead will be caught up with Jesus in the air, after which those saved who are still alive will also be caught up; this, by definition, will be a separation of the saved from the lost, who will remain on the earth.
6. The righteous will live with Jesus, His father and the Holy Spirit forever in heaven.
7. The lost will be cast alive into the lake of fire where they will ever be doomed with the devil and his angels.

We will show that these seven points are totally supported by the New Testament in the sections below. While this is not an exhaustive list of all of the details of judgment, the proof of this scenario contradicts all of the scenarios of premillennialism. There is no space for a thousand year reign on this earth or any of the other events which are speculated to occur on or around the judgment.

Again, we urge the reader to be totally skeptical of this scenario. We are not trying to prejudice the reader into a preconceived viewpoint. Read the scriptures presented below and determine for yourself if this is consistent with them or if some alternative is more plausible. Extend your study to read the context of the scriptures given to assure that we are not misapplying them. Finally, search the scriptures to assure that there are no other significant teachings on the second coming which we have omitted. With this, we will begin our study of the New Testament teachings with regard to the second coming of Christ. As before, we will proceed generally from the milk to the meat by starting with the gospels, proceeding through Acts and the letters to the churches, and concluding with the book of Revelation.

06.03 - Scriptural View of Judgment

6.3 SCRIPTURAL VIEW OF JUDGMENT

06.03.01 - The Gospels

6.3.1 THE GOSPELS

There are a number of references to judgment in the book of Matthew, but the first reference which deals with the events which will take place at the end of time is given in Mat 13:47-50: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." Note that the timing of this event is at "the end of the world." It is important for us to determine if there is a 1000 year reign, and, if so, whether it occurs before or after this event. The next mention of the second coming by Matthew is in Mat 24:1-51. Verses from this chapter are often taken out of context, and admittedly, it is difficult to tell whether some of them are talking about the second coming of Christ or the destruction of Jerusalem. However, this should not give us a problem, since our inquiry is limited to an examination of those events which will accompany the second coming. In those which might be questionable, we will see that the premillennialist doctrines are not supported even if we make the assumption that the questionable text is speaking of the second coming.

First, note that there are three issues being considered simultaneously by Jesus as determined in the preface to this chapter (Mat 24:1-3): And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to [him] for to show him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what [shall be] the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

Jesus was dealing with: (1) when the destruction of the temple would take place (we know now from history that it was destroyed when Jerusalem was destroyed in about 70 AD), (2) what shall be the sign of Jesus coming, and (3) what shall be the sign of the end of the world. Now, (2) and (3) might be two different things, since the visitation of God's wrath upon Jerusalem can certainly be considered an instance of a coming (or presence) of Jesus. (However, this does not fit our definition, and we will not use the term second coming in that way.) In any event, we need to read this chapter very carefully to attempt to determine just which questions Jesus was addressing in each grouping of verses. We ask the reader to verify that those verses that we do not quote are clearly references to the destruction of Jerusalem.

It appears quite clear that Mat 24:4-14 have quite general application. They did apply to the destruction of Jerusalem, but they also apply equally as principles of human nature today. We need to take these eternal sayings to heart; but they do not relate directly to our subject.

It is equally apparent that Mat 24:15-28 applies to the events prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. History tells us the Christians heeded this warning and escaped the city prior to the horrible siege which followed. Indeed, much of the language has no application to the end of the world (e.g., references to those who are with child, and the idea of flight). However, the last few verses are warnings not to believe that anyone at this time is the Christ. He says that many will make that claim, but they should not be believed because (Mat 24:27-28) "... as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together." This figurative language make it very clear that when Jesus does come again it will not be a hidden, secretive thing that is known only to an elite few, as some false religions are prone to teach. The second coming of Christ will be obvious, which we will see validated by many other scriptures. The figurative language of the next few verses could be applied either to the destruction of Jerusalem, to the second coming, or both (Mat 24:29-31): "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." If Jesus was speaking about the second coming then it totally fits the scenario proposed in Section 6.2. The fact that Jesus did not literally "send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet ..." to "... gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" at the destruction of Jerusalem is evidence that these verses are referring to the second coming. However, we would not press the case.

Basically, the remainder of Mat 24:1-51 makes it clear that no person knows or ever will know the time of Jesus second coming until the event actually occurs. It is very rich in inspirational figurative language, and we urge you to read it. The summary admonition is given in the last verse of the chapter (24:44): "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." The language in Mat 24:1-51 has been debated by biblical scholars over the centuries, and it furnishes us with a challenging study which can only build our faith. Regardless of whether you lean toward the destruction of Jerusalem, the second coming of Jesus, an intermixture of both, or dual meanings, one thing is certain: there is absolutely nothing in Mat 24:1-51 which in any way contradicts the scenario which we proposed above. Some of the language reinforces it, if indeed it does apply to the second coming.

Mat 25:1-30 contains two parables: the ten virgins and the talents. Both of these refer to a time at which a judgment will take place. Those who are judged are judged according to the preparations which they made and according to the abilities which they were given, respectively. There was no second chance, and those who were not prepared suffered extreme distress. Consider the summary verses to the two parables. First Mat 25:13: "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." Then Mat 25:30: "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." It is clear that the discourse of Jesus, which has continued from Mat 24:1-51, has now turned to His second coming and the judgment. This prepares us for Mat 25:31-46, which is clearly talking about the second coming and the judgment scene: When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy

angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth [his] sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed [thee]? or thirsty, and gave [thee] drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took [thee] in? or naked, and clothed [thee]? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done [it] unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done [it] unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did [it] not to one of the least of these, ye did [it] not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Jesus used an example of the fruits of the attitude of love that Christians will possess. It certainly is not exclusive, and the fact that we meet the minimal qualifications given no more guarantees our salvation than the fact that we have failed on so many occasions to meet the minimal qualifications guarantees our damnation. However, what is clear is that we will be judged according to our deeds -- the decisions which we have made while on this earth, which were either motivated by our faith and love for the Lord or our love of ourselves and faith in the teachings of man.

Compare this scene with the proposed scenario given above in Section 6.2. Jesus is clearly talking about his second coming -- "When the Son of man shall come in his glory." There is no mention of any thousand year reign intervening either before or after. The judgment is immediate: "then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth [his] sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left ... And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." Finally, note that the scene takes place "upon the throne of his glory," which is not necessarily on the earth.

Another reference to the second coming occurs shortly afterward when Jesus was accused by the council (Mat 26:62-64): "And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what [is it which] these witness against thee? But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Over and over again we hear Jesus saying that when he appears it will be in the clouds. Let us be very attentive to see if there are any scriptures at all that indicate that Jesus will set foot on the earth. (You might recall that this was not in our proposed scenario.)

Mark's and Luke's accounts of Jesus teaching with regard to His second coming reflect Matthew's very closely. Any good reference bible will show the parallel scriptures. We urge the reader to look them up and verify that they confirm what we have presented above. The gospel of John contains a number of additional teachings of Jesus with regard to His second coming. The first reference is found in John 5:22-29: For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all [men] should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

Note the following from this passage:

1. Jesus places the timing of the resurrection at the same time as the judgement,
2. "All men who are in the graves shall hear his voice." There will be a general resurrection of all of the dead.
3. The judgment and the resurrection will be very closely connected events: "they that have done ..., unto the resurrection of ..."

Once again, there is no contradiction with the scenario presented in Section 6.2. The next reference we introduced briefly above (John 14:1-3): "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if [it were] not [so], I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, [there] ye may be also." This was Jesus' last night with His disciples before His crucifixion. He was trying to give them assurance that while He was away from them they would be taken care of. He had a reason for leaving -- to prepare a place for them. He promised "I will come again, and receive you unto myself." We need to be careful that we do not allow false teachers to write things into passages that are not there. This passage gives us very little detail compared to the many others which we have. It is a very reassuring passage, which was Jesus' purpose; however, it tells us very little about the events surrounding Jesus' second coming.

Another reference in John's gospel relates to our subject even though it does not describe the events of the second coming. It does relate to the kingdom (John 18:33-37):

Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus

answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

We quote this passage at this time to introduce a fundamental concept with regard to the kingdom. Some premillennialists believe that it was God's purpose to establish a literal kingdom in Jerusalem when Jesus came the first time, but that Jesus failed in this regard. (This theory goes on to speculate that he will establish it upon His second coming.) Such a doctrine flies in the face of Old Testament prophecy which predicted the minutest detail of Jesus' purpose and how He would accomplish it by His death, burial and resurrection. Jesus would have established a worldly kingdom if that had been God's will. In fact, his obedience to God and failure to please the Jews in this regard is exactly what caused his crucifixion. Jesus makes this very clear here: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight ..." Further, Jesus asserts that He is a king. If so, it is essential that He have a kingdom to rule over (otherwise His kingship would be a sham). The interrelationship between our understanding of the nature of the kingdom of heaven and the 1000 year reign is very important, and we will discuss issues with regard to the kingdom in a separate section below. At that time we will return to John 18:33-37.

06.03.02 - The Book of Acts

6.3.2 THE BOOK OF ACTS The passage related to the kingdom immediately above provides an excellent introduction to the first reference to Jesus' second coming in the book of Acts. After Jesus' resurrection it appears that the disciples still did not understand what Jesus meant when He said: "My kingdom is not of this world." Consider Acts 1:6-11: When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

Notice the following:

1. Jesus did not tell them the time of the "restoration of the kingdom." He could not actually answer this question, because the question was improper (like the classical "when did you stop beating your wife?"). Had he given a time, they would have inferred that His concept of the kingdom was identical to their's, which it was not.
2. The response that he did give refers to the day of Pentecost when the first people were commanded to be baptized by His authority and into Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins. This established the church, which is synonymous with the kingdom, as we shall show below.
3. Note the similarity between this reply and the reply that Jesus gave to Pilate in John 18:37: "Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." Both refocus attention for literal worldly kingdoms to what is really important: the truth. The most important aspect of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was the communication of the truth.
4. Relative to the second coming of Jesus, the two men in white apparel said Jesus "shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." This is totally consistent with everything that we have established so far. As you recall, on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles enabling them to preach the gospel as the Lord gave them guidance. A very interesting part of Peter's sermon has to do with the kingdom. He had quoted an Old Testament scripture written by David and was arguing that it applied to Christ, not David (Acts 2:29-36):

Men [and] brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would

raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. The following conclusions can be drawn from this passage:

1. David spoke prophetically that one would sit on his throne. Peter said that he was, in fact, speaking about the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Christ put Jesus on "the right hand of God exalted," a throne far superior to any that David ever sat on.
2. Jesus is king. He has ascended to the throne. The kingdom, is "not of this world" -- not a political kingdom. Jesus is far above all such rule and authority (Rev 5:1-14).
3. Premillennialism assumes that Jesus will leave this throne and take on a worldly throne for 1000 years. There is certainly no evidence of that here. We need to recognize that Jesus is king now, and that all Christians are citizens of His kingdom. As we continue our survey of the scriptures which relate with the second coming, we need to seek out and find anything which relates to Jesus coming to this earth and establishing a worldly kingdom. If the bible does not teach it, neither should we. This is all that we found in the book of Acts with regard to the second coming.

06.03.03 - The Letters to the Churches

6.3.3 THE LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES

We will proceed systematically through the epistles in the order that they occur in the New Testament. The first reference in the epistles, and probably the most detailed account of the second coming in the bible, is in 1Co 15:1-58 beginning with verse 20. Clearly there were some in Corinth who denied the resurrection of Jesus. Paul dealt with this in a very systematic way, presenting over a dozen different arguments, the most devastating probably being the argument relative to baptism for the dead (see Section 4.2.3.3). While the arguments supporting the resurrection are not directly related to our subject, many of Paul's arguments are. We will deal with them a paragraph at a time starting with 1Co 15:20-28: But now is Christ risen from the dead, [and] become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man [came] death, by man [came] also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then [cometh] the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy [that] shall be destroyed [is] death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under [him, it is] manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. This passage details the events at the end of time in considerable detail. Let us note:

1. Christ's resurrection was the forerunner of the resurrection of all Christians who will have died prior to his second coming.
2. The resurrection of Christians will occur "at his coming." There is no intervening time. The very next sentence says: "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father ..."
3. At the end, the judgment, Jesus will have "put down all rule and all authority and power."
4. Jesus reigns now (Rev 5:1-14, Acts 2:29-36, and many other references on the kingdom which we will consider in Section 6.4). To affirm this is one reason that we introduced the concept of the kingdom above. Thus, when it says: "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet," it is talking about His reign over the universe now. However, while He has total authority and control, he is allowing the events of this world to play themselves out: all enemies are not destroyed yet ...
5. "The last enemy [that] shall be destroyed [is] death." The remainder of the quoted paragraph deals with the relationship between the father and the son. The next paragraph is 1Co 15:35-41: But some [man] will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? [Thou] fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other [grain]:

But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh [is] not the same flesh: but [there is] one [kind of] flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, [and] another of birds. [There are] also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial [is] one, and the [glory] of the terrestrial [is] another. [There is] one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for [one] star differeth from [another] star in glory. This discussion is actually a preparation to answering the question: "How are the dead raised up?" Recall that the main issue that Paul was addressing was whether or not there was a resurrection. The issues of the second coming are supplementary to convincing them that the resurrection was not already past. In the passage above Paul emphasizes differences which we observe in everyday life in order to open their minds to the fact that something different from what we have ever seen or experienced could certainly occur by the power of God. He uses this foundation in the next paragraph, which answers the questions of the skeptics (1Co 15:42-50): So also [is] the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam [was made] a quickening spirit. Howbeit that [was] not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man [is] of the earth, earthy: the second man [is] the Lord from heaven. As [is] the earthy, such [are] they also that are earthy: and as [is] the heavenly, such [are] they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

Notice first that there is only one resurrection spoken of by Paul: "the resurrection." Those who apply their physical, worldly reasoning in questioning the ability of God to accomplish the resurrection might just as well question His ability to create the world. This too is preparatory for the teaching with regard to the second coming of Jesus which follows in the next paragraph (1Co 15:51-53):

Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal [must] put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

Note, once again that this corresponds perfectly with the original scenario that we presented in Section 6.2. Please re-read both Section 6.2 and the entire context of 1Co 15:1-58 to verify that this is so. All of the previous verses deal with fundamental facts with regard to the resurrection. The passage given above addresses the chronological events which will occur at the second coming of Christ. Absolutely nothing is said about an intervening 1000-year reign. For completeness, we present the remainder of 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 to complete the thought. Recall, once again, that the apostle was completing his argumentation in support of the resurrection of the body (1Co 15:55-58):

O death, where [is] thy sting? O grave, where [is] thy victory? The sting of death [is] sin; and the strength of sin [is] the law. But thanks [be] to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. This completes the references to the second coming in the First Corinthian letter.

While the following rather lengthy reference in Paul's second letter to the Christians at Corinth does not add any new information with respect to the events surrounding Jesus' second coming, it does serve to further confirm our understanding of the scriptures presented to this point; it comes from 2Co 4:13 through 2Co 5:10:

We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present [us] with you. For all things [are] for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward [man] is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding [and] eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen [are] temporal; but the things which are not seen [are] eternal. For we know that if our earthly house of [this] tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in [this] tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing [is] God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

Therefore [we are] always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, [I say], and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things [done] in [his] body, according to that he hath done, whether [it be] good or bad.

Notice that Paul at this point assumes that they understood the events surrounding the second coming ("For we know ..."). Further, he binds the judgment closely to the resurrection, and speaks of these as one event at the coming of Jesus. The next references are in the letters of Paul to the Thessalonians. It was clear that they had a misunderstanding of the events that were to surround the judgment and second coming of the Lord. We will address these as we read the scriptures. The first is an introductory reference in 1Th 3:11-13: "Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all [men], even as we [do] toward you: To the end he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." As in the passage in Second Corinthians discussed in the previous paragraph, the teaching is that we need to be faithful to assure that we are blameless when Jesus comes. This infers that the judgment will take place at that time. Further, when Jesus

comes, he will come "with all his saints." This last point was a very significant one for the Thessalonians, for it seems clear that they had an idea that those who were still alive at Jesus coming would have some advantage over those who had died physically prior to that grand event. This would tend to promote additional grieving of those who would lose a loved one. Thus, he comes back to the issue of the second coming in the same letter (1Th 4:13-18): But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive [and] remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

While Paul goes on to further discuss some other aspects of the second coming, let us pause at this point to recognize the following points:

1. It is clear that "sleep" here means those who have died, and specifically here, those who have died while in a saved condition (i.e., in Christ).
2. Those who are alive are the saved ones who survive until Jesus comes again. The word prevent means to go before, or precede, and is so translated in most other versions. So the idea is that those who are still alive will not precede, or have any other advantage over those who have died in the Lord.
3. Note how consistent this is with all accounts which we have studied thus far: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." Clearly Paul is describing the second coming of Jesus. All accounts assert that he will appear in the sky, in the air, on in the clouds; but will he set foot on this earth? Read on ...
4. "... and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." This is so clear that any elaboration is merely redundant. All of the saved will be caught up together and live eternally with the Lord in heaven.
5. The words caught up are from the Greek word *harpazo*, which means to snatch or catch away. This is the only place in the New Testament that can be in any way used to call the second coming of Jesus the rapture. However, the use of this word was never intended. We will not interrupt the thought to deal with this error at this point. Rather, we refer the reader to Section 6.5 below.

Once again we urge the reader to compare this passage against the scenario in Section 6.2. The use of some of the identical words is no coincidence. This is not the end of the teaching in this context. Let us continue with the next paragraph in First Thessalonians (1Th 5:1-11): But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of

darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as [do] others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. This is the essence of the teaching with regard to the second coming. The most important thing is that we keep ourselves ready and anticipate that it will occur in the very near future. However, to conclude that the arrival was necessarily imminent was something that the Thessalonians erroneously concluded. Paul deals with this false impression in his second letter to them.

There is, however, an introductory paragraph which will give this even greater meaning (2Th 1:3-10):

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: [Which is] a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: Seeing [it is] a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. This is a very long sentence, but when we look at it one phrase at a time it is not difficult to understand. Let us focus on the parts which deal with the second coming:

1. They were bearing up well under "persecutions and tribulations." Paul stated that it would be "a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you ... when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ..." We learn clearly from the first paragraph of Chapter 2 (which we will consider next) that this is the identically same event that Paul was discussing in First Thessalonians (discussed immediately above).
2. "... In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ ..." This is a verse that you will not hear quoted very often. Clearly, however, at the very same time that the saved are caught away unto heaven, the lost will suffer the opposite fate in hell. This is as much a description of reality as any other scripture in the bible, and those who ignore it do so at their eternal peril!
3. Speaking of the lost, Paul goes on "... who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day." Clearly, these two events -- the punishment and the glorification -- will occur "when he shall come."

4. Notice the last three words of this passage: "in that day." What day? Clearly this is the day that the Lord will judge the world. What will happen in that day? Read back and notice that both the punishment of the wicked and the glorification "in his saints" will occur in that day. There is no 1000 year period between these two events. If the 1000-year reign were as important as denominational teachers want us to believe today, we wonder why the Holy Spirit did not mention it in any of these scriptures? As we go on reading into Chapter 2 we see that this is clearly the same event that Paul was describing in First Thessalonians, in which the saints still alive are "caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." (We observed above that this is where authorization for the concept of the rapture is sought -- see Section 6.6.) Here Paul addresses their misperceptions with regard to the timing of the coming of the Lord (2Th 2:1-12):

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

Consider the following points with regard to this passage:

1. Paul was concerned that they would be "shaken in mind" and "troubled" because of the delay in Jesus' coming that they were not anticipating.
2. Prior to Jesus' coming there would be "a falling away first..." Paul goes on to describe the apostasy in detail. It is clear that events which coincide with these details occurred during the dark ages. The reformation was an attempt to overcome the domination of this evil.
3. The evil that produced the falling away was already beginning to take its toll. There seems to be a withholding by God to allow the entire New Testament to be revealed. After that the falling away would come.
4. "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming ..." This is the same single coming that has been described in all of the scriptures that we have cited in this chapter.
5. The verses that follow are quite enlightening, and they explain much about our current situation. He states that the evil one "... is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish ..." The fact that powers, signs and wonders (the three words used to describe miracles in the New Testament)

might exist is no guarantee that the one who performs them is from God. Why would God allow such powerful deception? ...

6. "... because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." If this is not frightening to you, you should be gravely concerned. It was Paul's intent to instill within them the knowledge that just because a person is totally convinced of something does not make it reality. The only reliable standard is the eternal word of God.

We apologize for getting a little off the track. To get back on, you might review the scenario given in Section 6.2 once again, and assure that there is not contradiction to it in the passages given above. A minor reference is given in Paul's second letter to Timothy which is of interest (2Ti 4:6-8): "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished [my] course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." "That day" is the day that the "righteous judge" will give Paul his "crown of righteousness," which is figurative of heaven. The fact that Paul links this with the general reward to "all them also that love his appearing" infers that this will occur at the time when Jesus appears again.

Another minor reference is in Jas 5:7-8 "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." The early Christians understood that there was nothing complicated or mystical about the second coming. The next major reference is given by Peter. It appears that those to whom he was writing were being ridiculed by skeptics who were saying that the second coming should have already occurred (2Pe 3:1-7): This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in [both] which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior: Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as [they were] from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Note that there is one "day of judgment" in question. Also, the "heavens and the earth, which are now ... are ... reserved unto fire ..." This ties the destruction of the world as we know it with the day of judgment, although admittedly, this is not definitive proof.

Now consider the very next paragraph (2Pe 3:8-10):

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day [is] with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all

should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. The first statement is obviously a figurative statement -- it is not to be used in conjunction with other figurative statements to draw definitive mathematical calculations. Such is an abuse of scripture. The meaning is clear: time does not have the same meaning to us as it does to the eternal God. He might decide to wait a million years before keeping His promises; or He might decide to keep them today. One thing is sure, however, He will keep every one of His promises! The reason that He delays is given: He is "not willing that any should perish." However, the "day of the Lord will come, and when it does every one of us will experience it. Our prosperity in this life will be irrelevant at that point. Notice the details of the day of the Lord:

1. It will come "as a thief in the night," i.e., as we saw in 1Th 5:1-11 above, this means that many will not be prepared, and as Jesus said in Mat 24:36: "But of that day and hour knoweth no [man], no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."

2. What will happen? "... the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

Now if this happened after a definitive 1000 year reign, it would not be "as a thief in the night." However, this still totally conforms with the scenario which we presented in Section 6.2. The final paragraph in Peter's sequence is also very enlightening (2Pe 3:11-13):

"[Seeing] then [that] all these things shall be dissolved, what manner [of persons] ought ye to be in [all] holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

Again, the most important aspect of understanding the teachings on the second coming of Christ is in answering the question: "What manner [of persons] ought ye to be in [all] holy conversation and godliness ...?" The answer is embedded in the question: We ought to live lives such that we are: "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." At that point near the end of time as we know it, "the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." This describes once again the fate of those who are not "caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1Th 4:17). To the saved, on the other hand, there is the hope of the promise of God: "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Does this mean that there will be a 1000-year reign of Jesus on this earth? If so, it will not be on this earth, but on a new earth. If so, we will need to read about its initiation, duration, and termination from other scriptures. If so, it is not taught here. We believe that this is figurative of the entirely transformed existence which we will have which is described in 1Co 15:1-58 (see discussion on this above). In reality, it does not matter where this existence is, and we do not believe that it can even be described in terms of geography or astronomy. [Although it does matter that we do not bind our opinions in an attempt to sway the unstable.] The important thing is that the saved will be taken care of by God and can therefore look forward to this great day of God. Read once again the scenario given in Section 6.2 and assure yourself that no assumptions are being made. All of the details have been presented in the

scriptures presented to this point. An incidental reference to the judgment was made by Jude, apparently to demonstrate to Christians that they must remain faithful unto death (Jude 1:5-7): "I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." The judgment of the great day is the same judgment that we have read about above, which will occur at the coming of the Lord.

We have progressed from the milk of the word toward the meat. It is important that we do not take difficult scriptures and use them to force the meanings of the easy scriptures. Most of the scriptures quoted above are very straightforward, and those which might be subject to further discussion have absolutely no effect upon the scenario which we are attempting to either confirm, deny, or improve.

06.03.04 - The Book of Revelation

6.3.4 THE BOOK OF REVELATION

There are many parts of the book of Revelation which are figurative. Early in the book its author, the apostle John, stated (Rev 1:1): "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified [it] by his angel unto his servant John." The idea of signifying is that it is presented as signs, not as the "real thing." However, it was written to be understood and kept: "Blessed [is] he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time [is] at hand" (Rev 1:3). The first reference to Christ's second coming reiterates what we learned in Acts 1:11 (Rev 1:7): "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they [also] which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen."

There are a number of incidental references to the second coming, but they do not contain any detail on the events surrounding its occurrence. The next reference which does contain such detail begins with Rev 19:5. Prior to this point judgements were being meted out, but they were occurring on this earth prior to the final judgment. While they are not all necessarily in perfect chronological order, there is a general sequence of events which are progressing toward the final great day of the Lord. This is described in Rev 19:1-21 and most of the paragraphs that follow. We will discuss these one paragraph at a time. The first is Rev 19:5-10: And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed [are] they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See [thou do it] not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. This paragraph essentially establishes that this great prophecy of John is now turning to the end of time and the time of judgment. This is often referenced as the marriage feast of the lamb (Jesus), where the bride is the church (see Eph 5:21-33).

Another point which is quite important is that "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." We mentioned above in our consideration of Acts 2:1-47 that Jesus has taken the throne. This is further reinforced in Revelation chapters 4 and 5, which we encourage the reader to review at this time. In addition, we will discuss the meaning of the figurative use of the word kingdom in Section 6.5 below. For now, let us continue with John's vision of the judgment (Rev 19:11-16): And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him [was] called Faithful and

True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes [were] as a flame of fire, and on his head [were] many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he [was] clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies [which were] in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on [his] vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Clearly this is Jesus Christ (figuratively) upon the white horse. (Today he might be pictured riding upon a tank or a bomber; but recall that the primary targets of John's prophesy were Christians in the first century.) Notice, however, that the final judgment is not yet come: "... in righteousness he doth judge and make war." It is important that in the next paragraphs we distinguish between His making war on the evils which exist in this world today, and the final judgment. With this in mind, let us consider the next paragraph (Rev 19:17-21): And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all [men, both] free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which [sword] proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh. Is this the final judgment, or is it a "making war" judgment upon those who are exalting themselves against Him at this time. It is clear that we are dealing with highly figurative language, but the overall impression is quite clear: those who exalt themselves by their high positions upon this earth will pay a very dear price. We believe that this is not the final judgement because nowhere else in the bible is the final judgment portrayed as a battle. However, life on this side of judgment is universally pictured as a constant battle. Note, however, that although the entire forces of evil both in heaven and on earth are unified against God and His church, there is no contest. No battle materializes! Instead both the beast and they that worship his image are "cast alive into a lake of fire ... And the remnant were slain with the sword ... which proceeded out of his mouth ..." The illusion is clearly to the word of God (or the gospel) which is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16), and which is also the only offensive weapon of the Christian (Eph 6:17). [For the identity of the beast, see Revelation chapter 13. While considerable figurative language is used there, it is clear that the beast was a sacred-appearing operator of the devil, since he deceived many into worshipping his image.] At this point in the text Jesus has brought those who deceived the nations (the beast and the false prophet), and those who worship the image of the beast under His control. However, there is still the problem of the archenemy of mankind -- the devil (Rev 20:1-3): And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after

that he must be loosed a little season. This is the only verse in the New Testament that the premillennialists have as the basis for the "1000 year reign." What endless variations of concocted fables have resulted! Clearly it does not contain the detail that they attribute to it. For that matter, we have no assurance that it is even talking about the end of time as we know it -- or the time "after the rapture" as is the common denominational teaching. But, what does it mean? Consider the following possibility:

1. John's vision in the previous paragraph (Rev 19:17-21) is one of reassurance to a people who were being systematically killed for their belief that Jesus is the Son of God.
2. It would seem reasonable that this paragraph is a natural extension of that reassurance, indicating that the devil himself is going to be figuratively "chained."
3. Insight can be obtained by comparing this paragraph with Luk 10:17-20, which recounts Jesus' statements after the seventy teachers that He sent out returned to Him: "And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." Is this not the same reassurance that John was giving to the Christians to whom he was writing?
4. The purpose of this chaining is that "he should deceive the nations no more." This chaining is accomplished the same way that the seventy controlled the devils -- by the preaching of the truth. It is not a literal forcing of the enemy to submit via a worldly military victory.
5. The duration is a figurative 1000 years. To make this literal places premillennialists in a position where they would know exactly the end of the period at which the final judgment will occur, putting them in direct contradiction to the words of Jesus (Mat 24:36).
6. Figures are intended to reveal, not obscure. But, figurative of what? A 1000-year period is figurative of a substantial but indefinite time to man, but a short interval with God (2Pe 3:8). This is the duration that we should expect the Devil to be chained. We can also expect that "after that he must be loosed a little season" -- some of the same type of deception which occurred in the first century (and its accompanying persecutions) will occur before the final judgment.
7. This verse says nothing about Jesus coming to this earth and establishing a worldly kingdom at Jerusalem -- those that so teach are duty-bound to prove their doctrines with scripture, not just their imaginations. In fact, there is nothing in these verses that in any way conflicts with the scenario which we gave in Section 6.2. At this point assurance has been given to Christians that all of their enemies are under control. Now attention is turned to the final judgment (Rev 20:4-6): And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and [I saw] the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received [his] mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This [is] the first resurrection. Blessed and holy [is] he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

Remember that John is having a vision of future events both in heaven and on earth. See what he saw. He sees the faithful (in various shapes and forms) "and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." This is where the term 1000 year reign came from. Its proper use would be limited to exactly what John was describing at this point. But, is this significantly different from the Apostle Paul's assurance to the Christians at Rome? Consider these clear statements (Rom 8:31-39):

What shall we then say to these things? If God [be] for us, who [can be] against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? [It is] God that justifieth. Who [is] he that condemneth? [It is] Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? [shall] tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Premillennialists believe that they will be worldly conquerors with Christ when He comes to reign on this earth for 1000 years; but Paul says that "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" now! And this is the essence of what the apostle John is communicating. There is no reason to differentiate between these reigns. There is no reason to believe (other than dissatisfaction with God's plan for us) that there is anything sweeter on this earth than what we enjoy now. Indeed, the premillennialists make the same mistake that the Jews who crucified Christ made -- they were not satisfied with a spiritual kingdom; they had to have a literal, worldly rule.

We apologize for getting off on a tangent. Let us not, discard the teaching in Rev 20:4-6 as just being redundant with Rom 8:31-39. Indeed, it is much more than this, and there are some complex figures which we must address. Let us go through Rev 20:4-6 once again, this time, one verse at a time: And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and [I saw] the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received [his] mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. This is clearly not speaking of anything on this earth. Remember that John's vision was of heaven (Rev 4:1), although the things which he saw there were reflective of what would "shortly come to pass" on earth (Rev 1:1). From the characteristics described we can see that John, at this point, was seeing the fate of the righteous dead prior to the final judgment.

We know that this vision was limited to the dead, because the next sentence talks about the "rest of the dead," which must be the lost: But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.

It would seem reasonable that the lost did not live and reign with Christ, but instead remained in a state of deadness -- separated from God. (This is consistent with the story of Lazarus and the rich man which Jesus told as recorded in Luk 16:19-31.) The next statement: This [is] the first resurrection. clearly applies to those dead in Christ who lived and reigned with Christ for the

figurative 1000-year period in waiting for the final judgment and the general resurrection of the just and the unjust. This is further confirmed in the next sentence:

Blessed and holy [is] he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. The second death is explained further below. It is the ultimate death that those who are lost will experience at the final judgment, the first death being physical death. While Christians who die physically experience this first death, the second death will have no power over them.

Again, the language here does not necessitate a physical death. Peter stated: "But ye [are] a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past [were] not a people, but [are] now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy" (1Pe 2:9-10). The transition from physical life to physical death is a nominal one for the Christian. While the main thrust of Rev 20:6 is that the righteous dead are reigning with Christ, there is no reason to believe that those of us on this earth do not share in this reign now. One of the major losses of the premillennialists is that, in their quest for a worldly kingdom in the future, they fail to recognize the blessings of Christ reigning in our lives now. At this point we turn our attention to the next paragraph which elaborates upon the events which will occur after the 1000 years have expired (Rev 20:7-10): And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom [is] as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet [are], and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Recall that the purpose of the binding of Satan was that "he should deceive the nations no more" (Rev 20:3). The loosing of Satan will enable him to once again exercise the type of deceptive control that was apparent during the dark ages. The nature of deception indicates that this will not be very apparent to any but those who can see the degradation of mankind in general.

Evidence that the nations are being deceived in a wholesale way abounds. In the United States, which was long thought to be a bastion of the Lord's church, we see (1) close to 30% of pregnancies terminated in abortion -- well over a million a year, and over 30 million since our supreme court was deceived into thinking that this was a good thing, (2) pornography flowing totally unrestrained into virtually every household under the guise of free speech, (3) a growing dependence of government upon taxes collected from gambling, tobacco and alcohol, all of which give power-hungry politicians every incentive to promote and grow these vices as being beneficial to society, (4) a total breakdown of the family, with governmental incentives to people to have illegitimate children and not live together as man and wife, (5) a divorce rate near 50%, (6) homosexuality being promoted within our public school (i.e., by our government) systems as an "alternative life style," (7) the giving up of our governmental officials on attempts to instill the values of chastity, and the promotion of fornication by the distribution of condoms. We could go on and on. But we leave you with this challenge: if Satan has not been loosed to deceive the nations now, what more can we expect when he is? If Satan has not been loosed, then we are certainly in

an era of preparation for that very event. Christians are being assaulted on every hand by the subtle influences of the devil. Clearly the battle has begun. But there is hope: "and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet [are], and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever." Soon the judgement will take place, and this is the scene of the next paragraph (Rev 20:11-15): And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is [the book] of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

There can be no doubt that this is the judgment scene, and it is described in total consistency with all of the very clear and literal descriptions given in the gospels and the epistles. Notice that the second death is defined here -- it applies only to those who are outside of Christ. At this point the final judgment is over. John now looks forward to those events to follow judgment for the saved (Rev 21:1-4): And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God [is] with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, [and be] their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

Those who would apply any of this to the 1000-year reign would either be deceptive or misguided, since it clearly applies to the time after the final judgment. Further, those who teach that heaven will be on this earth fail to recognize the clear distinction that John makes between the current heaven and earth and the new heaven and new earth. The new heaven and earth will have little resemblance to the current earth, and to teach that they are the same defies the distinction that John clearly intends to communicate here. At this point John leaves the scene of the second coming of Christ, which puts it out of the scope of our discussion. For completeness, the following gives a summary of the remainder of the book of Revelation by paragraph:

Rev 21:5-8 The promise from the one that "sat upon the throne" that "I make all things new," the reassurance to believers and the threat that "the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

Rev 21:9-14 The demonstration to John of "the bride, the Lamb's wife," which included a view of the "great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God," and the figurative description of the eternal habitation of the saved.

Rev 21:15-21 A continuation of the description in terms of priceless jewels and metals.

Rev 21:22-27 The perfection of heaven; the fact that "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple and the lights of it, that "there shall be no night there," and "there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither [whatsoever] worketh abomination, or [maketh] a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

Rev 22:1-5 The vision of "a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," the tree of life, and further glories of heaven.

Rev 22:6-7 The assurance that "These sayings [are] faithful and true," and the promise: "Behold, I come quickly: blessed [is] he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book."

Rev 22:8-9 John's attempt to "worship before the feet of the angel" which showed him these things, and the rebuke and admonition: "worship God."

Rev 22:10-11 The further admonition to "Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

Rev 22:12-13 Jesus promise to "come quickly" and to reward "every man according as his work shall be," followed by the assertion: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."

Rev 22:14-15 Further blessedness of the saved and the terrible fate of the lost.

Rev 22:16 A note from the originator of the book: "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, [and] the bright and morning star."

Rev 22:17 The plea: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Rev 22:18-19 The threat to those who would add to or take away from these words: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and [from] the things which are written in this book."

Rev 22:20-21 The closing: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you all. Amen." This summary is not an attempt to add to or to take away from God's word in any way. Hopefully we have organized some of these thoughts for comparison with other scriptures. But the ultimate authority is the word of God itself, there is absolutely no substitute for the direct study of God's word, and we have stated from the outset that our intent is not to add to God's word in any way, but to stimulate study of it so that we may all arrive at a more accurate perception of the truth. In this regard we wish to add that the author does not claim any type of the inspiration which John, Paul, Peter and the writers of the New Testament possessed which enabled them to write in perfect harmony with the revelation of the Holy Spirit. This being the case, we wish to emphasize especially for this section, that we are subject to the same human error that any and every person in this world can make when discussing possible meanings and applications of God's word.

We say that this is especially true for the book of Revelation because of its highly figurative nature. It seems quite clear to us that God wants to challenge us to study all of His word, and that some of it is quite difficult and hard to understand for this reason (recall 2Pe 3:16). We make no apology when we echo the words of the great Apostle Paul when he said (Rom 11:33-36): "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable [are] his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, [are] all things: to whom [be] glory for ever. Amen."

Thus, we challenge the reader, and emphatically state that it is your responsibility, to determine the validity of our explanation (or anyone else's). Knowing that, if nothing else, it is flawed by our own powers of expression, we further challenge you to improve it. However, as you embark upon this endeavor we plead with you not to concoct strange fables which go beyond (2Jn 1:9) that which the Book of Revelation asserts, and then twist and wrest the other very clear and obviously literal scriptures to fit these strange theories (see 2Pe 3:16 once again).

06.03.05 - A Review of Our Scenario

6.3.5 A REVIEW OF OUR SCENARIO The scenario which we presented in Section 6.2 was not a preconceived idea. Indeed, as we presented the scriptures in the New Testament which deal with the second coming of Jesus, we made a number of changes to assure that this scenario is not only totally consistent with scripture, but that it also communicated the essence of the events as they will unfold near or at the end of time as we know it. At this point we ask you to go back and read all of the scriptural references which we have presented. Or, better yet -- read the entire New Testament through with the sole purpose of identifying every scripture which states anything about the second coming or the judgment. It will not take too long, especially if you are just reading for that purpose. As you read, verify or improve upon the scenario which we proposed, which now we have validated, and present below for your convenience:

1. Jesus second coming could be at any time and we should always be ready for it.
2. Jesus' imminent physical recognition (presence) will be signalled by the voice of an archangel and the trumpet of heaven. It will be an event that is obvious to all people on the earth.
3. Jesus will appear in the clouds.
4. This will be followed almost immediately by a general resurrection of both the just and the unjust.
5. The righteous dead will be caught up with Jesus in the air, after which those saved who are still alive will also be caught up; this, by definition is a separation from the saved from the lost, who will remain on the earth.
6. The righteous will live with Jesus, His father and the Holy Spirit forever in heaven.
7. The lost will be cast alive into the lake of fire where they will ever be doomed with the devil and his angels.
8. This earth will be burned up as part of the process, and God has promised a new heaven and a new earth to those who are saved.

Again, we do not claim that this scenario improves upon the bible's description -- it does not! There is no better way to say it than the way that the bible does. We urge the reader to pick up your bible and assure that the above is consistent with scripture.

If it is consistent, it leaves no room for "the rapture." The bible never speaks of the second coming as "the rapture." Any attempt to furnish a scriptural basis is a play on words, which we discuss in detail in Section 6.6. It is unfortunate that when the denominational organizations might be doing so much to promote a respect for God's word, that they have seen the need to "help God" by adding something that, had He wanted it in His word, He surely would have put it there. At this point we wish to go into a little more detail on two points which have confused bible students for some time. The first of these relates to the chaining of satan, and it compares two scriptural

passages which were discussed independently above. The comparison gives additional insight into the meaning of the 1000 year reign. The other subject involves an understanding of just what the New Testament means when it talks about the "kingdom."

06.04 - More on the Chaining of Satan

6.4 MORE ON THE CHAINING OF SATAN

Rev 20:1-10 was written to Christians who were experiencing a great deal of persecution and who needed hope that God would take care of them despite the overwhelming worldly odds that we against them. Like the rest of the Book of Revelation, it was written in figurative language to convey the essence of the message without necessarily revealing the specific events to which these principles and promises applied. Many of the figures used portray the basic principles of human nature as they apply to man's response to a loving God who must allow the horrible consequences of sin to be revealed in this world so that we will not have to experience it throughout eternity. Even if we could definitively pin down the original application, these scriptures still apply to all men everywhere in principle.

2Th 2:1-12 was written to Christians who were not under the same degree of persecution. However, they were deceived into thinking that the second coming of Christ was necessarily imminent. Paul addressed their need in a more literal way, although the specific application might still be subjected to argumentation. Since we have given our explanation to both of these scriptures independently above, we will not elaborate further. Instead, we will allow these two passages to provide a commentary on each other. We will do this by interleaving the passages where we believe they have similar application. We start with 2Th 2:1-7:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and [by] our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for [that day shall not come], except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth [will let], until he be taken out of the way. The falling away was allowed by God. It could have been prevented, but to do so would restrict the free will of man. Clearly, however, God will not allow Satan to have the power to exercise this deception until the end of time. Thus, the promise that he will "be taken out of the way," which is described in more detail in Rev 20:1-3: And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. The chaining of Satan would lead to the revealing of those who are wicked and exercising their control over the nations. This is reflected in 2Th 2:8-10: And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: [Even him], whose

coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

Paul was emphasizing the time frame -- certain things had to happen before the second coming: A falling away -- an apparent triumph of Satan. But it was to be only temporary. On the other hand, John is emphasizing the hope that will still exist as long as we know that God is in total control. We continue in Rev 20:4-6: And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and [I saw] the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received [his] mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This [is] the first resurrection. Blessed and holy [is] he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom [is] as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. The battle is for the minds of men; it is not a military battle. Certainly, military battles will result, which will demonstrate the true nature and the ultimate result of the influence of Satan. But without deceit, Satan is powerless. It is man's misperception of reality that causes all of his trouble (John 8:32). The deceit is described by Paul in 2Th 2:11-12: And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. This is attributed to God only because He allows Satan to exercise his deadly powers in His presence. God cannot sin, and He cannot be tempted with sin (Jas 1:13), but it is clear that as part of His judgmental authority, He will allow men who do not have a love for the truth to be deceived by the strong delusion of Satan. However, even the ultimate deceiver will be destroyed. This judgment of the deceiver, which has already been alluded to by Paul, is described by John (Rev 20:10): And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet [are], and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. The purpose here is not to present a chronology of events -- it is to compare the principles which are being presented in both passages. Both deal with the second coming; both deal with Satan -- his ability to deceive, God's allowing of him to function, and God's limiting and ultimately eliminating his power.

We can understand this even if we have difficulty in pinning down the specific dates of the 1000-year reign. In fact, there is no danger at all in presenting all that God has given us on the subject, and allowing the hearers to draw their own conclusions. Problems arise when influential teachers add to God's word and become not only the deceived of Satan, but also deceivers themselves.

06.05 - On the Kingdom

6.5 ON THE KINGDOM

Entire books have probably been written on this subject, but our intent here is to limit the discussion to the meaning of the word kingdom in the New Testament, especially as it relates to the second coming of Jesus. These two concepts are interrelated, since some premillennialists believe that Jesus attempted to establish a literal worldly kingdom during His first coming. The implication is that He failed, but he will succeed during the 1000-year reign.

It is difficult for us to see how this can be anything but an insult to God. Reread Rev 20:1-9. Is there anything there about the establishment of a kingdom? Is there anything there (or anywhere else in the New Testament) about Christ coming to this earth? (We agree that He will be in the new heaven and new earth, but that is clearly after the 1000-year reign.) But let us get back on the subject. We stated that we could not address the false doctrines, because there are as many of them as there are false teachers. Without scriptural authority, the variations of premillennialism are endless. However, if the nature of God's kingdom is understood, these card houses fall of their own weight. We will attempt to be as brief as possible while presenting the essence of the meaning of this word as it affects the New Testament teachings with regard to Christ's second coming. The first use of the word kingdom in the New Testament is in Mat 3:1-2: "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This gives us an immediate insight into the meaning as far as its availability was concerned. Prior to the death of Jesus on the cross the kingdom of heaven was not directly accessible to mankind. There was a general notion of eternal life with God (e.g., see Ecc 12:7). However, it was clear that the Jews in Jesus' time did not understand the nature of the kingdom which John the Baptist was introducing. The Jews were a kingdom under the Old Testament. At first God was their king, and then He allowed them in rebellion to appoint Saul, who was succeeded by David and Solomon. Even after the divisions and enslavement which followed, the Jews still understood that they were God's chosen people. The Old Testament kingdom of Israel, however, could not have been the kingdom of heaven that John the Baptist was talking about. If so, his statement would have been senseless. "At hand" did not infer that it already accessible. Neither did it infer that it was 2000 years off, nor even 10 years off. "At hand" is a term which indicates that we can reach right out and touch it, even though it might not be immediately grasped.

It is very important that we add a qualifier here. The word kingdom is used in a variety of ways in the New Testament. What we are concerned with is the way that it was most commonly used so that we can use it in this same biblical sense today. Otherwise we cannot help but cause misunderstanding. We should answer the question: What did Jesus mean when He used the word? and this should dictate the general meaning for us today. In one sense, the literal kingdom under the Old Testament predated the coming of Jesus to this earth. We see this usage in Mat 21:42-43:

Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

Here Jesus uses the word in two different senses: in the Old Testament sense: "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you." In the New Testament sense it would be "given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." We shall see that when Jesus and John the Baptist said it was "at hand," they were not talking about the literal kingdom of Israel. The teaching on the kingdom was very inviting to the Jews, and many were baptized by John. Their concept, however, was that the messiah would make Israel the central and only world power to dominate all of the other nations. This belief still persists to this day with many Jews. Unfortunately, premillennialists cannot see that they are making the identical mistake.

Lest we think it possible that John the Baptist was mistaken, notice Mat 4:12-17: "Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison ... From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." So Jesus taught the identical teaching regarding the accessibility of the kingdom of heaven. It was "at hand."

Teaching on the kingdom pervaded Jesus teachings. Sometimes He called it the kingdom of God, at other times the kingdom of heaven, and often just the kingdom. It appears nine times in Matthew's account of the sermon on the mount alone (read Mat 5:1-48; Mat 6:1-34 and 7). Most of His parables dealt with matters of the kingdom (see, for example, Mat 13:1-58). It is very clear from the wealth of teaching that Jesus wanted us to know exactly what the kingdom is. The first mention of the church in the New Testament binds it tightly to the kingdom. When Peter confessed: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God (Mat 16:16), Jesus responded: "... upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven ..." While this is not definitive proof that the two are one and the same, it begins to add to the weight of evidence in this direction. The next reference gives us more specifics as to the time when this kingdom would become a reality (Mat 16:28): "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." Thus, we can conclude that this event would have had to occurred sometime in or very shortly after the first century. If it has not yet been established, then someone from the first century is still alive. Common sense tells us that this is not what Jesus was trying to communicate. The issue of when the kingdom would come was an important one in Jesus day (Luk 17:20-21): "And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." Clearly they were looking for a physical, political kingdom. Can we understand this today? -- with our grand organizations and large buildings trying to stake our claims to a piece of the kingdom? It is not in organizations and buildings, it "is within you." A kingdom requires a king, a dominion, and subjects. The King is clearly Jesus. His dominion is heaven and earth -- the entire physical and spiritual universe. His subjects are the saved -- on this earth now: Christians -- but also all of the saved that have gone before. Let us observe this from Heb 12:18-24: For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which [voice] they that heard entreated that

the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, [that] Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than [that of] Abel.

While the word kingdom is not stated explicitly in this verse, would any deny that we are come unto the eternal kingdom of God? The most critical aspect of the three aspects of the kingdom (a king, dominion, and citizenship) to us is citizenship. It is essential that recognizing the nature of His kingdom today that we, as His citizens, continue to be faithful in rendering obedience to Him. As we continue to explore scriptures on the subject, let us validate that this is what Jesus had in mind when he said "the kingdom of God is within you." The confirmation of the saved being the subjects of the kingdom is clearly established by John 3:1-5: "There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and [of] the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The terms of entry into the kingdom are identical to those for entry into Christ's body, the church.

John 18:33-37 gives us additional enlightenment:

Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

It is not at all strange that Pilate did not understand how anyone could be a king without a visible, worldly, political kingdom. Jesus' communication to Pilate was given much more for our edification than for his. Note the following:

1. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. This does not necessarily mean that it does not include citizens in this world, as we will see. It does mean that it is not the typical "worldly" type political kingdom in which military power is used to enforce its edicts ("my servants fight").
2. Jesus did assert that "Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." Clearly Jesus asserted that He was King. The essence of this kingdom is an

accurate perception of reality on the part of both the King and His subjects. The mistaken belief that the kingdom is of a political, worldly nature persists to this day. This is expected, since even after all of Jesus' teaching on the subject, which were carefully absorbed by His apostles, they were still unclear about its very nature. It is clear that the crucifixion was precipitated by Jesus' unwillingness to meet the demands of the Jews in this regard. However, we would expect that after the resurrection the apostles would have a different view of the kingdom. That this was not the case is heavily inferred by their questioning of Jesus at the very end of the forty-day period after His resurrection and immediately before his ascension into heaven; recall Acts 1:6-9: When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

While not definitively proven, the inference here is that they were still expecting a worldly kingdom. Like many misdirected religious questions today, Jesus could not answer this question "yes" or "no," since each of the simplistic answers would have been misleading. In a sense he was going to establish the spiritual kingdom, His church (Mat 16:18) imminently (within ten days during Pentecost -- Acts 2:1-47). But in the political sense, which is probably the sense in which they were viewing the kingdom, this would not be the case. In fact, there is no evidence in scripture anywhere that Jesus would establish such a political kingdom. (Those teaching this error have the burden of proof in this regard.) The burden of proof is on us to show the nature of the kingdom that Jesus established in fulfillment of Mat 16:28: "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." This is not difficult. We merely look at the answer that Jesus gave to the question of "wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" in Acts 1:1-26. His response was: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you." This occurred on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2:1-47. Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit stated things that he obviously did not understand prior to that time. Among them are certain definitive statements with regard to the kingdom (Acts 2:25-28): For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

(Note: the Greek word interpreted hell in the King James Version is more accurately translated hades by most other versions, indicating that this was the place of waiting of disembodied spirits as opposed to the place of eternal damnation. The King James version makes no distinction between the different Greek words. This detail has no bearing on the subject of the nature or establishment of the kingdom.) The Jews did not understand this prophecy from the Old Testament, or else they would not have crucified Christ. The fact that the very ones who crucified Christ did understand it after Peter explained it to them (under the guidance of the Holy Spirit) is ample proof of the validity of Peter's explanation as well as the demonstration of the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit. His explanation follows (Acts 2:29-36):

Men [and] brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell [hades], neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Since we have already discussed this passage, we hesitate to comment further on it. Its teachings are so clear that false teachers will need to write entire books to explain it away. We humbly beg the reader to read it over ten or a hundred times and ponder over it. It was convincing enough to make 3000 of the vilest of sinners -- the very ones who crucified Christ -- to repent and be baptized in that same hour. If this passage will not convince you that Jesus has taken the throne of David by ascending to heaven and sitting at the right hand of God, nothing else that we might write will. The major point of departure here is between worldliness and spirituality. Are you willing to serve a spiritual king? Are you willing to give your life as a total sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2) to someone who will not come to this earth and establish a political kingdom? Apparently very few are, for without the bait of the rapture and the 1000-year-reign on this earth, they will not worship the king. Can we not see that this is precisely the error of the ones who crucified Christ the first time? Why do we continue to crucify Christ afresh in our hearts (Heb 6:6)?

We apologize if the paragraph above is offensive to some, for we anticipate that it will be. If so, please read Acts 7:1-60. We value your offense so much more than your complacency. Jesus said (Rev 3:15-16): "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth." Your aggravation is better than your complacency. Remember, our primary mission is to get you to read and study God's word for yourself, not to formulate your conclusions for you. If what we are saying does not coincide with the word of God, prove it! But let us get on with our proof. Prior to Pentecost, the kingdom was always spoken of in prospect -- as being "at hand" or to be established. After Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47), the kingdom is never spoken of as being at hand -- it is always spoken of as reality. It is a kingdom which we can now become citizens of due to the shedding of the precious blood of Christ. The remainder of this section will present the verses that prove this. The first of these is given in Acts 14:21-22: "And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and [to] Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, [and] exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." We cannot tell from this verse whether the Apostle is speaking of the present entering in or some future entering. We present this verse merely for completeness. There are several other references in the book of Acts that link the preaching of the gospel with the preaching with regard to the kingdom of God. But, like this one, they shed little light on whether the apostles felt that the kingdom had come, one way or the other. This should not bother us, for the book of Acts is primarily a history, as opposed to a doctrinal

exposition. The next reference is in Rom 14:16-17: "Let not then your good be evil spoken of: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." This provides some evidence of a current realization of the kingdom, but we do not feel that it is definitive. Similarly with 1Co 4:20: "For the kingdom of God [is] not in word, but in power," where the word here is referring to the mere reasoning of men. Both of these references as well as their counterparts in the most of the epistles speak of the kingdom of God as being a reality now, not a prospect for the future. The next reference indicates that some aspect of the kingdom is still in prospect (1Co 6:9-11): "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." There are many references comparable to this one which talk about the inheritance of the kingdom. It is important to recognize that while Christians are citizens of God's kingdom which exists now, the permanent inheritance of it will not be a reality until after the judgement. Paul was making this point: Although Christians are citizens of the kingdom, they can lose their eternal inheritance if they participate in these vices.

Recognize further that Paul is not teaching on the subject of the establishment of the kingdom here -- he is speaking of their eternal inheritance. The fact that a person is currently in God's kingdom does not assure that he will inherit the kingdom. This is what he is trying to impress upon them. They were washed from these things to enter into the kingdom (John 3:3-5); however, if they go back to these things they will not inherit the kingdom throughout eternity. The kingdom of heaven is also spoken of as an inheritance in 1Co 15:50, Gal 5:21, Eph 5:5, and many, many other places. In this regard it is not something which we possess now in the sense that it cannot be lost (reference: Php 3:13-14). However, those who are citizens of the kingdom can only be displaced from this inheritance by their own volition (Rom 8:35-39). The next reference is in 1Co 15:24, which we discussed in great detail in Section 6.3.3, above: "Then [cometh] the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power." This verse very clearly indicates the presence of the kingdom now, since you cannot deliver up something which does not yet exist.

One of the most definitive references on the understanding of the apostles with regard to the existence of the kingdom is given in Col 1:12-13: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated [us] into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, [even] the forgiveness of sins." This clearly teaches that Christians are citizens of the kingdom now, and that their entry into the kingdom took place when their sins were forgiven, which is totally consistent with John 3:3-5. The apostle Peter put it this way (1Pe 2:9): "But ye [are] a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past [were] not a people, but [are] now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." The holy King of this "holy nation" is Jesus, and among its subjects were the Christians to whom Peter was writing.

There are many other references to the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven in the New Testament, and we urge the reader to obtain a concordance and look them all up. See if any of them predict the establishment of a kingdom of any type some time in the future. All of the references to the kingdom after the Day of Pentecost either describe the responsibilities of Christians as citizens of the kingdom or else they look forward to our final inheritance of the kingdom after Jesus comes again. The reason that we have included this subsection is that most premillennialist doctrines use the word kingdom almost exclusively to refer to a political, worldly government that Jesus will establish when He comes again. We have shown that the bible contains no such indication. If we use bible words in bible ways it would be difficult to infer biblical authority for things which are totally foreign to the scriptures.

We have shown the verses that demonstrate the reality of the kingdom for us today. Those who believe that it has not yet been established must fly in the face of these clear verses; or else they must explain that there are really two kingdoms, one which is now and another which is to come. We do not deny that the word kingdom is sometimes used in the New Testament in reference to eternity (as opposed to the current time). However, the false teacher is duty bound to prove that these are two different kingdoms. They are not since they have the same King (Jesus), the same dominion (the universe), and the same subjects (the saved). The burden of proof is upon them. We appeal to the reader to put them to the same test that you have put us. Let them present evidence like that presented in this chapter, rather than just writing all of this off as being divisive and negative. They will not, only because they cannot!

06.06 - On the Rapture

6.6 ON THE RAPTURE

Many use biblical words (such as fellowship, church and Christian) are commonly used by denominational teachers in ways that they are never used in the bible. While not sinful in an of itself, when done to infer biblical authority for worldly practices this is nothing short of being dishonest. Either the false teachers do not recognize that what they are inferring is counter to the truth, or else they are intentionally attempting to mislead. In either case, they should not be teaching things that do not originate from God's word (2Jn 1:9), and followers should insist that they provide the proof or cease such teaching; if not, they share in the guilt (2Jn 1:10-11).

What about the word rapture? We cannot complain about this being a bible word used in an unscriptural way, since the word rapture (as used by denominational teachers) is totally foreign to the bible. The reader is urged to check any complete concordance to confirm this. The general definition of rapture as we use this word in the English language is very great joy; ecstasy. Absolutely no one that I know disputes the fact that there will be very great joy (rapture, if you will) in heaven. For those who are saved, there will be rapture at the arrival of Jesus to judge the world as described in the scriptures which we have presented above. But does this authorize us to give the second coming of Jesus this name: "the rapture." The only defense of this term that the author has heard is obtained from 1Th 4:1-18, which we have already discussed above. Let us consider it again, this time to see how the word rapture might apply (1Th 4:13-18): But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive [and] remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Those who seek biblical authority for the use of the word rapture state that the Latin root for the term caught up is the same as for our word rapture. This is the sum total of their authority. Is this reasoning valid? Is this the way that we establish authority for the words that we use and the things that we teach?

First, let us admit that this has a shred validity. New Webster's Dictionary indicates that the word rapture is derived from the Latin "rapere, raptum to seize and carry away." We have heard rapture proponents state that the word rapture means to be "caught up, snatched." However, this is the meaning of the Latin root, not our current English word. Several other English words, including the word rape, are also derived from these Latin words, but that does not change their English meanings. No one would dare intimate that "caught up" in 1Th 4:17 would authorize us to substitute the word rape because it is derived from the same Latin root.

If 1Th 4:17 provides the scriptural basis for calling the events which it describes "the rapture," then why would not a Greek word having the meaning of our word rapture (i.e., great joy, ecstasy) be used? Examination of a Greek interlinear bible and Vine's Expository Dictionary show that the Greek words chara, agalliasis, or euphosune indicate joy. Properly qualified, one of them would come close to the meaning of our English word rapture. But the Greek word used in 1Th 4:17 is harpazo, which means "to snatch or catch away." This has the meaning of physically moving with no reference to emotions whatsoever. It could have a positive sense, such as snatching someone out of the path of a speeding automobile; or it could have a negative implication, such as seizing someone to kidnap them. The word itself has no moral or emotional implications at all. In their ardor to bring legitimacy to a term foreign to scripture, false teachers have engaged in religious double-speak. Why can't we be satisfied with using the words that the Holy Spirit used in describing Christ's second coming? Our attempts to "help" God in this regard inevitably mislead and deceive. If it cannot be found in God's word, then it is not the truth and it should not be taught. If it is not the truth, then it is of the devil and can only bring the consequences of deception.

06.07 - Is This Important?

6.7 IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Once again we anticipate this question. After all, what's the big deal? If people want to believe that Jesus is going to come to this earth and establish a kingdom for a thousand years, what can it hurt?

What can any lie hurt? If we have no regard for reality, then it just does not matter. If religion is just some game that we play, and one belief is just as good as another, then it does not matter. If we really don't believe that the bible is the truth anyway, then it just does not matter. If we think that God does not care, then it just does not matter.

However, if we believe that God is the author of the bible and that He wants us to constrain our teaching to just what he has given us there, then it does matter. If we believe that the word of God is sacred and we dare not pollute it with the teaching of man, then it does matter. If we believe that Jesus is going to judge us by His gospel, then it matters. If we believe that the truth liberates and that falsehood enslaved, then it matters.

If nothing else, it matters because of the attitude toward God's word which any departure creates. If we can make it up as we go along with regard to Christ's second coming, then why can't we make it up as we go along on moral issues? How much of the immorality and disrespect for God's word in denominational churches has been caused by disrespect of God's word on the simplest of doctrinal matters? The substitution of fairy tales and fables for reality creates the type of mystical approach to religion that pervades the denominations. The gospel of Christ is not a fairy tale. It is an historical and doctrinal presentation that can be validated by secular history, by the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and by the written testimony of honorable and just men who gave their very lives for the truth. It is the pure and perfect word that God wants us to learn and teach. Why waste time diluting the truth with the contrivances and imaginations of men? But if all of this does not prove the point, perhaps 2Jn 1:9-11 can: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into [your] house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." If you believe this verse you will not teach anything that cannot be definitively proven from God's word, and you will insist that your teachers give book, chapter and verse for all that they teach.

It does matter that we teach the truth on all subjects to the utter best of the abilities that God has given us. To turn our back on the truth for any reason is to exhibit our dissatisfaction with what God has given to us.

07 - Myth 7: Original Sin

CHAPTER 7 MYTH 7: ORIGINAL SIN

07.01 - Definition of Terms

7.1 DEFINITION OF TERMS The doctrine of original sin originated with the Roman Catholic church. It is totally foreign to the New Testament. While many denominations were created out of their rejection of the tenets of the Roman Catholic church, most of them still have remnants of doctrines and practices whose roots are in the dark ages. Such is the case with the doctrine of original sin. In this chapter we will define the doctrine as it is currently believed by many denominations and discuss those scriptures which are relevant to it.

We define original sin as the doctrine that humans at birth inherit the sin of Adam. The logical consequence of this doctrine is the belief that the souls of children are lost at birth. The remedy to this prescribed by the Roman Catholic church was infant baptism -- a mystical sacrament which broke the spell that satan had over the new born. Other terms that it is known by include: inherited sin, and total hereditary depravity. While some denominationalists reject the formal theory, they will state such things as "man is by nature totally inclined toward sin." The net effect is the same -- it tends to blame our nature, as created by God, as being responsible for our sins.

We recognize that few members of denominations today believe that a child who dies prior to being subjected to baptism (or a christening ritual which is called baptism) is eternally lost. However, in our observation of current denominational beliefs we still hear the common sentiment that man is born "totally depraved." Further, the fact that so many denominations still practice the ritual of christening of infants is indicative of the presence of this lingering superstition. To show that the doctrine of original sin is totally false and counterproductive, we will demonstrate that the following doctrines are true:

1. At birth children are totally free from sin, and they remain in that state until they reach an age when they can distinguish right from wrong according to God's authority.
2. Once attaining the age of accountability, when the young adult violates God's law, he or she becomes guilty of sin and is then in need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ as the only hope for being restored to fellowship with God.

We do not expect these two premises to be accepted without proof. To do this, we will present the scriptures which will demonstrate their validity. After that, we will discuss the scriptures that are sometimes used in an attempt to prove the doctrine of original sin. In a final section we will discuss the damage that this particular false doctrine causes.

07.02 - Original Sinlessness

7.2 ORIGINAL SINLESSNESS

We can start with the Old Testament, which never held the child responsible for the sins of the parents. Eze 18:20 makes this very clear: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." What could be clearer. If God wanted us to know that children do not bear the responsibility for the sins of their parents, what words could He use that would make it clearer than those given in Eze 18:20?

Now, if God is no respecter of persons, this principle must apply to all men and women for all time. Cain and Abel were not condemned for the sin of Adam. Neither were any of their descendants, including each one of us. This does not mean that we do not suffer the consequences for their sins. Consider one of the consequences of Adam's sin (Gen 3:17-19): "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed [is] the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat [of] it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou [art], and unto dust shalt thou return." There can be no question that we still suffer today from this consequence of Adam's sin. But there is a big difference between suffering from the consequences of his sin and inheriting his sin. The difference is as extreme as the difference between the physical and the spiritual. The consequences which we suffer from Adam's sin are strictly physical. If we inherited his sin, the consequences would be spiritual. This inherited sin would cause us from birth to be separated from God and potentially condemned eternally.

Many suffer from the consequences of the sins of others. The alcoholic certainly brings grief to all with whom he comes in contact. If he causes an auto accident and kills someone, the victim suffers the ultimate consequence for his sin. Yet, the victim does not inherit the sin of the drunk driver. We should be able to distinguish between being an innocent victim of sin and inheriting sin.

All children are the innocent victims of the sins of their parents, their family and the people in their society. They will be led to commit sin at some point in their lives. Had sin never been brought into this world, they would not be led to become sinners themselves by others. (This is not to say that one of them would not commit the first sin.) This evil environment that does exist is one of the consequences of Adam's sin. But, it is still not an inheritance of Adam's sin. The bible shouts loudly from every page that we are all free-will agents, and each one of us will have to give an account for what we do -- not for the sins of others. We all suffer the physical consequences of both our own sins and the sins of others. However, we fall victims to the spiritual consequences of other people's sins only when we follow them into sin ourselves.

Mat 18:1-5 demonstrates that children are not born sinners: At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and [that] he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

These children were not Christened or put through any other ritual which would magically remove them from the alleged curse of original sin. Does this sound like Jesus believed these children inherited Adam's sin? Instead, it is very strong evidence that children are not in sin prior to reaching an age where they can understand what sin is -- what we are calling the age of accountability. The burden of proof is on those who teach the doctrine of original sin to produce the scriptures which teach it in order to counter such strong evidence against it. A follow-up verse in Mat 18:1-35 is verse 10: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." This is all we know about the subject of what might be called guardian angels. We will not speculate on this, but we can strongly infer that these angels would certainly intervene if an adult were to "despise one of these little ones." Does this sound like God views them as sinners?

Another incident confirms the one given above; it is recorded for us in Mat 19:13-15:

Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put [his] hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid [his] hands on them, and departed thence.

Other versions translate "of such is" as "to such belong." Indeed, the kingdom of heaven is made up of those who are as innocent as were these children. Those who are cleansed by the blood of Christ to enter into the kingdom of heaven (John 3:5) become as little children. We can all see the complication of this logic if little children inherit the sin of Adam.

We can also see that children are innocent of sin by the definition of sin itself. According to 1Jn 3:4: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." Again, consider 1Jn 2:16: "For all that [is] in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." Does a child have: the lust of the flesh? the lust of the eyes? and the pride of life?

No, instead the bible uses childhood as the figure of purity and holiness (John 3:3): "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Now if a man is born in sin, why would he want to be born again? Jesus would not have used this figure if the doctrine of original sin had any validity at all.

Sin is not acquired by inheritance -- it is acquired by transgression of (failing to keep) the law of God. We will discuss at what point this takes place in a young person's life in the next section.

07.03 - When we Fall

7.3 WHEN WE FALL The bible clearly states that "... all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Does this mean that children inherit sin? It cannot, for it says "all have sinned." If we look at the context, the comparison is between Jews and Gentiles. Paul starts with the Gentiles in Rom 1:1-32, and he goes on to discuss the Jews in Chapter 2. His conclusion in Chapter 3 is that there is no distinction between the nations: all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. This infers that all who are capable of sin within those nations have sinned.

Now, if a child does not inherit the sin of his or her ancestors, when does the child become a sinner? We cannot give a definitive answer, such as 12 years 6 months and one day. The point at which a child becomes an adult cannot be defined for it varies with each individual. There is a gradual maturing over time. It is fairly obvious that at age 7 or 8 the process is just beginning. It is also obvious that at age 21 the process is completed. However, between these ages there is great variation in the point at which different individuals mature. Determining the point in this maturing process that a young person becomes guilty of his or her first sin is quite problematic. The bible is silent on this question, reflecting the great wisdom of God in maintaining the free-will agency of those who are raised by Christian parents. It seems, however, that we can learn much by considering the point in life when a young person could legitimately render obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ in baptism (see Chapter 4). In this regard, we submit the following for your consideration:

1. While a child understands some concept of right and wrong from the age of a few months, this is almost totally self-serving, as God intended for instinctive self-preservation.
2. As the child begins to mature, this selfish response mechanisms begin to develop into the education of the conscience; however, this conscience is educated primarily in relationship to parents and secondarily to the child's peer group.
3. With further maturity the young adult establishes a separate identity and becomes capable of independently rendering obedience toward God.
4. The decision that a young person makes to be baptized must be in obedience to the commands of Jesus and absolutely nothing else. While this might please this person's parents or peer group, it must not be done to produce a conformity with their will. If so, it is not obedience to God, it is obedience to man.

If it is not done in complete understanding and obedience solely to the will of Christ, then it is not valid baptism, and the principles which are exemplified in Acts 19:1-7 apply. Recall that these individual who were baptized by John's baptism were baptized again into the name of the Lord Jesus. [Even though their original baptism was consistent with the will of God, it was not according to the authority which was then in effect (Mat 28:18). How much more, then, when the first "baptism" is not even in response to God's command.] That same age at which one could legitimately render obedience to the will of Jesus in baptism is the age at which that person

becomes guilty of sin. This follows from Jas 4:17: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth [it] not, to him it is sin." It follows that this person is also guilty of any other sins that are committed in violation of the will of God. The only way that these sins can be forgiven is by the cleansing power of the blood of Christ which applies when one renders obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We saw in Chapter 4 that this culminates in baptism.

07.04 - Misapplies Scriptures

7.4 MISAPPLIED SCRIPTURES

There are a few scriptures in the bible which the proponents of the original sin doctrine will attempt to twist to fit their ends. As usual, when only a few scriptures can be produced to justify a doctrine, and when these seem to be contradictory to the vast majority of sound, clear biblical teachings, something is wrong. The bible does not contradict itself in any way; thus, there must be an explanation which can reconcile the two seemingly contradictory passages. Let us examine some possibilities.

Perhaps a favorite verse is Psa 51:5: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Let us first reason from the meaning of the verse itself: does it say that David, the writer, inherited the sin of Adam? No. The verse itself (out of context) might indicate that David's parents were in sin at the time of his conception. This seems to be the meaning of the verse at face value. There is no inference from the verse itself that David is guilty of sin because of the sin of Adam or the (possible) sins of his mother and father. So, even taken out of context, this verse is not supporting the concept of original sin.

Placed into its proper context, we can see what David is really attempting to communicate. It is clear that this is the point in David's life where the depth and gravity of his sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12) has been fully recognized, and David is in considerable guilt, sorrow, and repentance. He is expressing this guilt and sorrow with some of the most pathetic words in the bible (Psa 51:3-5): For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin [is] ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done [this] evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, [and] be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. This last sentence when placed in context shows that the face value interpretation that we originally placed upon it is not what David was trying to communicate. Rather, he is trying to communicate his feeling of guilt and total depravity. He totally acknowledged the responsibility for his acts of sin and cover-up. He made absolutely no excuse. He did not blame Adam, or his parents, or God, or anyone else. He took total and full responsibility for his sin. His sin was against God and God alone, for he had broken the commands of God, and those commands were far above any human considerations. True, the consequences fell upon Uriah most directly. Moreover, many, many others suffered because of David's sin -- Bathsheba, their child, David's family, ultimately the entire Kingdom of Israel, and who knows who else? But none of these consequences would have been suffered had David not sinned against God. It was not love and respect for his fellow man which would have averted these things, it was his love and respect for the will of God, which David knew and understood. Thus, as it says speaking of God: "... that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, [and] be clear when thou judgest."

David knew and fully expected the consequences of the sin that he had committed. If we would expect anyone to seek an excuse for this sin, we would expect it of David. But, being a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), David did not take this most common route. Instead, he placed the

entirety of the blame upon himself -- and rightfully so. It is in this context that we find David arguing to the extreme: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Our paraphrase: "It is not that I was living a perfect life before you, oh God, and just committed this one sin. I have been sinful ever since I can remember. I throw myself on your mercy." We believe that David engages in hyperbole to make this point as emphatically as he can, thus going beyond the point of remembrance to the point of his very conception. This surfaces a very interesting point, which it is convenient to address at this time. The fact that children are inherently selfish is often used as an argument to support the doctrine of original sin. When a child first cries out because of pain or hunger, this is a survival instinct, not an act of selfishness. At that age the concepts of consideration and selfishness have no meaning. Someone would have to have a weird concept of a loving God to believe that He would condemn such a being to eternal Hell for suffering an untimely loss of life at this point. To further believe that some ritual performed by others will save this person is rooted in pagan beliefs -- such is totally foreign to biblical teaching. However, we do need to deal with what David was saying, i.e., despite my efforts to the contrary, there is not a time in my life when I cannot remember being a sinful person.

While we do not inherit our sin from Adam, we do enter a world which has been shaped by not only the sin of Adam but also all of the sins since that time. It is a world so full of sin that the word worldly has been synonymous with sinful. That every person, with the sole exception of Jesus, has been led to sin by this sinful environment is not the question (Rom 3:23). But here is where the words might be ambiguous: we might say that we are all totally depraved, but we cannot state that this is because of the inheritance of a sinful nature passed down from Adam. Reason: this lays the blame squarely on the shoulders of God, and makes God a respecter of person -- expecting something different of Adam and Even than He expects of us. Adam and Eve did not blame God for their sins, and neither should we. I am condemned because of my sin, not because of Adam's. I am totally depraved because I have chosen to follow a pathway of sin, not because Adam so chose. This was David's attitude, and it should be ours today. This is what the bible teaches regarding personal responsibility. The doctrine of original sin flies in the face of this clear teaching.

Another example to attempt to justify the doctrine of original sin is Psa 58:3: "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." Finding an inheritance of the sin of Adam requires a leap of faith from this verse, since this is neither stated nor implied. Here, again, David is using hyperbole, and in this regard he is applying the same reasoning that he applied to himself to the wicked in general. We can see that this is not literal, since clearly infants do not "go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." They cannot even speak at this point. We use hyperbole in our speech everyday. We might say: "he ran as fast as a scalded dog." It makes the point most explicitly, but clearly we do not intend it to be taken literally. In verse 10 David contrasts the "wicked" of verse 3 with the righteous. If all of mankind inherited the sin of Adam, then verse 3 would apply to everyone, and there would be no class of righteous to contrast them with. The point is that David is stating realities with regard to sin and unrighteousness -- he, and the Holy Spirit through him -- were not addressing whether or not we inherit the sin of Adam. Neither should we misapply this verse to draw inferences with regard to the doctrine of original sin, other than to say that these verses do not relate to it.

Let us consider a passage from the New Testament which is often misapplied. The proper understanding of this passage is very important, and it gives us a very definitive understanding of

what was delivered by the Holy Spirit with regard to this issue (Rom 5:12-21):

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: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also [is] the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, [which is] by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as [it was] by one that sinned, [so is] the gift: for the judgment [was] by one to condemnation, but the free gift [is] of many offenses unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

Therefore as by the offence of one [judgment came] upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [the free gift came] upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. On the surface, many people read this and believe that it supports the doctrine of original sin. However, we question whether they would think this way if they did not have the doctrine of original sin in their minds already. Reasoning backwards promotes rationalization. Does this passages say that every child born into the world inherits the sin of Adam? If so, we should accept it. But let us examine it more carefully:

1. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men ..." There is no ambiguity here. We agree that if no one had ever sinned, sin would not be in the world. Sin had to enter the world first by one man. (Hypothetically, if it had not been Adam, it could have been one of his descendants.) According to the punishment previously pronounced by God, this is also when death entered the world (Gen 2:17): "... for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." So death entered into the world on the very day that Adam sinned. The fact that Adam did not die physically on that very day is not relevant, for God did not say that he would die on that very day; only that death would become a reality that he would have to anticipate from that day forward. This consequence of sin (death) then passed to all men because of its introduction into the world at that point, i.e., "death passed upon all men ..."

2. The question is why? Why has death passed upon all men. Is it because we inherit the sin of Adam? No such thing is implied. The same verse says: "... and death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." The implication is that your death is caused by you and my death is caused by me. In the spiritual sense, we know this to be true -- our own personal sins cause spiritual death (separation from God). Literally, when Adam sinned he caused spiritual death (separation) from God in that very day. However, we will admit the likelihood that Paul is speaking of physical death here. We have no record of anyone in the New Testament living a perfect life; however, in the Old Testament there is an example (Gen 5:24): "... and Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." Heb 11:5 further enlightens us on Enoch: "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." While not conclusive proof (we do not

know that Enoch never sinned), this single counterexample indicates that the responsibility for our own death cannot be passed off to Adam. I have sinned, so I am worthy of death. The entire issue here is whether we are ready to take responsibility for our own sins.

3. When we sin we demonstrate that, had we been Adam, we would have done exactly what he did in eating the forbidden fruit. Thus, had Adam not brought sin into this world, you and I would have! It is essential that we come to grips with this reality. When we proclaim ourselves to be better than other sinners we are on very perilous ground (remember Luk 13:1-5). The Hebrew writer put it this way (Heb 6:6): "If they shall fall away, [it is impossible] to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put [him] to an open shame." Thus, when I sin, I am equally guilty as those who yelled and screamed for the crucifixion of Christ. What sin could be more worthy of death than that?

4. The next verses indicate that Adam is "figure of him that was to come" that is, Christ. However, the figure is one of contrast: "But not as the offence, so also [is] the free gift." In explaining this figure, Paul asserts that: "through the offence of one many be dead." Does this mean that we die solely because of Adam's sin? This might be the logical conclusion if we had taken this out of context; but we have already seen that verse 12 teaches otherwise -- we all suffer death because we have all sinned. However, one person had to be the first sinner -- the one who brought death into the world and suffered the consequences promised by the perfect word of God (Gen 2:17). Once death was brought into the world, it could not be brought in again. Indeed the only remedy was that it be taken out. And that is where the perfect symmetry of this figure holds: For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, [which is] by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. (Rom 5:15)

If, in fact this verse is teaching that we all inherit the sin of Adam unconditionally, then it must also teach that we all receive the gift of salvation unconditionally. Thus, universal salvation. In reality, both sinfulness and salvation are conditional: sinfulness upon our own sin (not Adam's or anyone else's), and salvation upon our faith in God's word (Mat 7:21). This verse is thus teaching that Adam was the first sinner, thus bringing the hopelessness of death, while Jesus as the first perfect man brought in the hope of life.

5. Similarly verse 19 repeats this concept: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." If, in fact, Adam's sin forced us to be sinners, then the righteousness of Christ would force us to be righteous. The exact same words are used. We cannot honestly choose to interpret them in one way in the first application but in a completely different way in the second. The word made in this verse cannot mean forced to be, for this removes the free-will nature of man which is a major central theme of the entire bible. The word made can also mean shaped, formed or constituted. Indeed, if sin had never entered the world, no man would ever have become a sinner; in this sense they were made (shaped into) sinners by the presence of sin in the world. Similarly, if Jesus had not died on the cross, there would never have been the chance of salvation; thus, in this very same sense his sacrifice made them to be righteous.

Again, the bible is not contradictory. That which proves total depravity also proves universal forced salvation. Who can believe this contradiction? We are compelled to apply terms consistently and not wrest those things which are admittedly easy to misunderstand without some detailed study

(2Pe 3:16).

07.05 - Consequences of Original Sin Doctrine

7.5 CONSEQUENCES OF ORIGINAL SIN DOCTRINE A most vexing problem of the doctrine of original sin is our understanding of who Jesus was and what He did for us. If we believe in original sin, there is no escaping that Jesus himself must have been born in sin. Heb 4:15-16 states: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as [we are, yet] without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." If Jesus was born separated from original sin, when the rest of us are not, then this statement could not be made. Further, the bible teaches in Php 2:6-7 with regard to Jesus: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." It is clear that if all mankind since Adam was born in original sin, then Jesus must have been born in original sin; who can believe it? Of course, as is true of all false doctrines, this one has its capacity to enslave (John 8:32). The Roman Catholic church teaches that the only way to break the spell of original sin is by applying to infants the holy water which only it can create. This produces a strong obligation to "christen" these children into the church, and later to induct them in without the benefit of obedience to the full will of God (including scriptural baptism). How many have given themselves over to this system? And yet, few of the denominations have totally rejected these superstitions. By accepting the basic doctrine of original sin, and continuing to practice infant "baptism" as a remedy, many denominations have continued to give credence to this myth which originated with catholicism. Obedience to these superstitions do not show faith in the Lord who sent the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles into all truth.

These are the obvious, direct consequences of the doctrine of original sin. However, the subtle effects cannot be underestimated. If, in fact, we are altogether depraved from birth, then how can a just God blame us as individuals for our propensity toward sin? Note that we do not deny that mankind has a propensity toward sin -- an inclination or disposition toward it. The question is: how did we (as individuals) come to have it? Is it because we have inherited the sin of Adam? Or, is it because we, of our own volition, have had to have our own way separate and apart from God? The former denies our guilt and the responsibility for our sin; thus, who else is to blame but God? How can we accept salvation as a free gift of God? and, how can we appreciate the sacrifice which Jesus made for us? If we blame God in the least bit for our own sins, there is not a chance for us to fully understand the relationship which we must have with God if we are to be saved.

08 - Chapter 8: Where Does This Leave Us?

CHAPTER 8 WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

08.01 - So What?

8.1 SO WHAT?

If you have gotten this far in the book we can attribute it to one of three possible reasons: (1) you see and appreciate the gravity of the denominations continuing to foster myths and wish to do something about it, (2) you so adamantly disagree with most of what we have written that you have read in detail with the purpose of refuting it, or (3) you skipped over the details and are reading the last chapter without reading all that precedes it. This introductory section of this chapter will address the third of these reader types, since we feel that the other two types are highly motivated to take whatever actions they feel appropriate in any event.

Yes, we can conceive that some will still have a complacent attitude even when presented with the sound scriptural evidence which proves that the denominations are generally guilty of teaching myth rather than sound doctrine. We have tried throughout the chapters to demonstrate the downside of these myths. We should be concerned, as the apostle Paul was when he wrote to Timothy (2Ti 1:3-4: "As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: [so do].") Despite all of this, we still feel that some will have a "so what?" attitude at this point. So, before prescribing a scriptural remedy to this problem, let us take one more shot at changing this mindset. The name of this book is Seven Myths of Denominationalism, not The Seven Myths of Denominationalism. The reason for the former rather than the latter title is our firm belief that the promulgation of myths is in no way restricted to these seven. We have no doubt that we could easily find seventy, or maybe even 700 myths. We attempted to select those which were most predominant, easy to explain and easy to demonstrate their inconsistency with scripture. Perhaps we chose wrong; but in no event do we wish to imply that these are the only problems within the denominations. The major problem stems from the central theme that all denominations share, and which is their single unifying force: Myth 1. That is, the concept that, since we cannot understand the bible alike, why try? Further, Myth 1 implies that anyone who teaches that the bible can and should be understood is the enemy. This person is the divider, the bigot, the close-minded, and whatever other name might serve to discourage people from listening to such "heresy." As long as this is the predominating attitude within the denominations, there is absolutely no incentive to alter practice and doctrine. To do such would be an admission of error on the part of the leadership. This is not going to happen, at least not on a very broad scale. Does this mean to imply that everything taught within the denominations is wrong? (Please bear with us on our response here, since it cannot be answered with a simple yes or no.) In the sense that some of the teachings of the denominations are consistent with the teachings of Christ, we must answer in the negative. The Roman Catholic church teaches accurately on the subject of abortion, the Moslem religion teaches accurately on the subject of temperance, the Jewish religion teaches accurately that thou shalt not kill. Does the fact that some of the teachings of a given religion are consistent with the will of God justify any and all deviations from God's will? If so, then it would be hard to find

any religion at all that should be opposed. Universalism would be correct, and we would do well to abandon our search for truth. The bible is so definitively against this most liberal view of religion that we are hesitant to cite scriptures for fear of under-representing the view. We urge the reader to pick out three pages from the New Testament at random and read the condemnation of this view. We feel that, while it might be possible to find three which do not do this, the vast majority of them clearly do. Let us just cite two key scriptures which destroy this liberal viewpoint. The first is Mat 28:20: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The second is Mat 4:4: "But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." We cannot just pick and choose, and the fact that we are doing some things right does not justify those things which are amiss (Jas 2:10): "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one [point], he is guilty of all." We cannot trivialize any part of God's will for us. This brings us back to our original question: Does this mean to imply that everything taught within the denominations is wrong? If those things which are being done right are being done because they are commanded or authorized by the word of God, then those things are right. We contend, however, that, even if they are consistent with the word of God, if they are being done because they are commanded or authorized by any authority other than the word of God, they are vain attempts at salvation by works. For, they are works of man, not works of God. Indeed, they might be the same as those commanded by God, but, in reality, they are being done in obedience to man and not to God.

Give this considerable thought. Let us illustrate with an example. The Roman Catholic stand against abortion is a brave and courageous stand for what is right. However, those Roman Catholics who obey this command do not do so because of biblical authority. If you do not believe this, just ask one of them to give the biblical reasons that they believe abortion to be wrong. They cannot answer. Their answer is that the church teaches (or the Pope) teaches them that abortion is wrong, and this is the reason that they do not engage in it. Is this obedience to God or to the Pope? True, it is consistent with biblical precepts, but unless they recognize where and why it is commanded of God, it is faith in man and not God.

We use the Roman Catholic church as an example because we believe most of our readers can be objective in their application of these principles to that institution. Of course, that which applies to the Roman Catholic church applies equally well to the denominations, and vice versa. (Obviously, many myths of denominationalism are also myths of the Roman Catholic church.)

Again, we refocus on our question: Does this mean to imply that everything taught within the denominations is wrong? If it is taught and practiced as the doctrine or tradition of the church and not based on the will of God, then the answer is: yes. This concept is so fundamental that we need to break it out:

Any doctrine which has originated with man and is taught as a tradition or doctrine of a religious organization defies the authority of God despite that within itself it might be consistent with His will. To determine if this is true, consider the following examples:

1. Mat 3:7-9: "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to [our] father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children

unto Abraham." Coming to be baptized of John was clearly according to God's will; however, they were doing it for the wrong reason and by the wrong authority.

2. Mat 19:16-22 tells of a young man who came to Christ asking: "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" When Jesus informed him to "keep the commandments," he responded that: "All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go [and] sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come [and] follow me." When he heard this "he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions." Question: Was he following the commands of God out of obedience to God or to man? If it was out of his faith to God, then would he not have followed Jesus? By what authority as he obeying God's commands -- those of God, or those of his society?

3. In Acts 5:1-11 there is a story of a man and his wife who made a very large financial contribution to the work of the church. This was certainly consistent with the will of God (see Acts 4:36-37). However, because they did it for their own benefit and not in subjection to the will of God, they were struck dead.

4. In Acts 16:16-18: "And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour." Who can deny that the testimony of the damsel was not the truth. Yet, coming from the authority of the spirit of divination, it gave the truth a bad name.

These are but a small sampling of literally dozens of such examples which could be gleaned from both the old and new testaments. These illustrate and prove the premise given above. Not only do our actions have to be consistent with God's will, they must also be motivated by our faith in His will for us, not just something that happens in some ways to be consistent with His will.

If you have drawn the conclusion that the motives of the people in the four examples was not right, this would be a valid conclusion. Are we questioning the motives of those in the denominations who apparently do many things consistently with God's will but because of the teachings of the denominations rather than the word of God? We cannot do this, because we do not know their motives. However, we can state this very emphatically: if they are doing what they are doing because of the teaching of man (whether right or wrong), this cannot be attributed to their faith in God.

Now consider the following question:

If a religious organization admittedly does some things without the authority of God (e.g., teach any myths at all), by what authority do they do the things that are consistent with God's will? This is a very sobering question: If biblical authority is discarded in some areas, what compels the members of the organization to not discard it in all areas? Can that organization indeed state that they do X by the authority of God, when, in fact, it is known that they do Y without His authority. Can it not be reasoned that if Y is done without His authority, chances are that X is also being done by the same authority of Y even though X happens to be consistent with God's will. If this, in fact, is the case, then nothing that that organization does is by the authority of Christ, even though

some of their teachings and practices might be consistent with biblical edicts.

Now let us qualify these statements. It is possible that some of these organizations are striving to do all things that the word of God teaches. There is an easy way to determine this. Study the seven myths publicly and, if the organization is teaching and practicing any one of them, move to conform with biblical teachings. It is our experience that the very study of these issues will not be allowed in most denominational organizations. What does this tell us about the basic source of authority of that organization?

Question: is an organization which is based upon the authority of man rather the authority of God a saving institution or a losing institution? If your religious organization does not teach the biblical plan of salvation, is it saving souls or making sure that they stay lost? These are sobering questions that we all must address. It is not my job to go all over the countryside determining the authority by which various groups are doing things. However, as a member of your religious organization you can surely answer these questions. In the following sections we propose what to do if you come to a negative conclusion.

08.02 - The Alternatives

8.2 THE ALTERNATIVES

We will consider two alternatives to the status quo: (1) redirection and evolution, and (2) restoration. The second of these will be necessitated by a failure of the first. We will describe each of these alternatives in the next two sections.

08.02.01 - Redirection and Evolution

8.2.1 REDIRECTION AND EVOLUTION

We pose this alternative not because we have ever seen it work, but because it is theoretically possible. It is interesting to explore this option from a theoretical point of view. We will describe the organizational dynamics and the problematic nature of reform. This will give us the background to initiate an evolution in a positive direction, if this is possible. If not, this will lead logically to the alternative described in the next section.

Let us begin with some observations from history. Virtually all organizations (religious or otherwise) start out relatively small with a highly motivated, tightly-knit group of individuals who are often complementary in their abilities. As these organizations begin to function they overcome obstacles by pure human ingenuity and a sense of destiny. Often there is a charismatic leader (in the secular sense), and there are few political or bureaucratic considerations. These young organizations will either die quickly and be forgotten or flourish. Those which prosper will grow, and their success will attract additional members.

Attracted by the success as opposed to the cause, the second generation of members is usually not as enthusiastic as the first, especially if they are induced by such things as nepotism and friendship as opposed to dedication. Thus, success brings its own seeds of destruction. It is soon recognized that if the organization is to survive, certain resources must be dedicated to its survival as opposed to satisfying its original goals. Thus, a bureaucracy develops, and compromises in the original goals are made to assure that both the undedicated membership and the outside world continue to support it. This process can take several generations to evolve. Ultimately, it degenerates into a massive bureaucracy, where the bureaucrats have considerable difficulty recognizing any difference between their own self interests and those of the organization.

We see this process repeat itself in virtually all organizations which are composed of humans. One would be naive to think that it does not happen in religious organizations. The fact that it was going to happen in the Lord's church is clearly taught in the New Testament. Consider the following passages, which are but a small set of those which could be cited to prove this:

1. Acts 20:28-30: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Note that the predicted apostasy would come from within the leadership. This fits the common trend in human organizations to move in the direction of a self-serving bureaucracy.

2. It is clear that the church at Corinth was already beginning to self-destruct (1Co 1:10-17): "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and [that] there be no divisions among you; but [that] ye be perfectly joined together in the same

mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them [which are of the house] of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect." Clearly they were beginning the denominating process of dividing themselves up and giving themselves names. As we read the rest of First Corinthians we can see both the moral and doctrinal decay that accompanied this departure from the truth.

3. Gal 1:6-7: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ." It is clear that a process of departure had already begun in the Galatian churches.

4. Paul indicated the motives of the false teachers to the Phillipian Christians (Php 3:17-19): "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end [is] destruction, whose God [is their] belly, and [whose] glory [is] in their shame, who mind earthly things.)" Once a person has a vested financial interest in an enterprise, it is difficult for him to distinguish between his own personal interests and that of the organization. Unfortunately, when this happens in the Lord's church, the price that is paid for such selfishness is measured in lost souls.

5. 2Th 2:1-4: "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and [by] our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for [that day shall not come], except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." You should have no problem identifying this as the Roman Catholic apostasy. It is not speaking of another religion. It is talking about a "falling away." Thus, this is an apostasy of the church, not a religion outside of that which was initiated on the day of Pentecost.

6. In case there is any doubt, Paul spoke of this same apostasy in 1Ti 4:1-3: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, [and commanding] to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth." Note that this is also a prediction that some would "depart from the faith," not attack it from without. Could any more definitive description be given of the characteristics of the false doctrines of the Roman Catholic apostasy? The examples could go on for pages; indeed an entire book could be written just on this aspect of the evolution of the Lord's church. It is clear, that we should not expect any religious organization to maintain its integrity over several generations. Indeed, if this did not

happen in the first century in the presence of the inspired apostles, why should we think that things would be any different today? This scenario appears to be futile. If human nature is such that even the most sound and dedicated of religious organizations are destined to self destruct, should we just throw up our hands and forget it. Indeed, if your faith is in any organization of humans, you probably should, for they will let you down every time. However, if your faith is in Jesus Christ this will be seen as only a minor inconvenience. Is it possible to transform an organization which is steeped in denominational tradition to one which is totally dedicated to doing everything by the authority of Christ? Jesus own words state that "nothing shall be impossible" (Mat 17:20; Mat 19:26). We have heard of some isolated instances where it has occurred, although this was not first-hand knowledge.

Any transformation must begin with a single individual within the organization. Recognize that when we use the word organization we are referring to the local church unit. Since no higher organization than this is authorized by the New Testament (see Section 8.3), it would be impossible for regional bishops to implement the transition without allowing their churches to operate on an independent basis. Obviously, the more that this individual's authority is recognized within the local organization, the greater the potential to lead a transition. The first step is for this individual to fully conform his or her life to the precepts of the New Testament in every possible way. Further, this leader must have an excellent knowledge of biblical principles. Both are essential, for no matter how far a group might be from conforming to God's word, they will still identify deficiencies in this regard. The reasoning is summarized as follows: "Total conformity based only on the New Testament is impossible; after all, look at the fact that you are not consistent in the matter of X." Nothing will defeat the effort quicker than a lack of knowledge and dedication in this regard. The second step is to influence as many as possible to initiate a thorough study of God's word with the one and only goal to change all doctrines and practices which are not totally in accord with it. The study for this reason is much different from that generally practiced in the denominations, since the New Testament is generally not considered to be the final authority for doctrine and practice. So, while it is studied, it is impossible to modify practice or doctrine based upon that study. It is recommended that these bible studies be set up independently of the formal church meetings unless a majority wish to engage in such serious studies. The third step has to do with monitoring the progress. While setbacks should be expected, as long as there is significant progress from month to month, there is reason to continue. Progress can be measured by the following: (1) additional interest in bible studies as measured by additional faithfulness and continued discussions between formal study times, and (2) changes actually brought about by knowledge gained in the bible studies. On the other hand, if there is clearly no progress after several months of effort, another approach will be required (see Section 8.2.2). Do not be discouraged if your zeal for the truth is not met with general acceptance. In fact, the following realities argue strongly against this transition taking place:

1. The vested interests in the denominational leaders. Their financial and career interests are lodged in maintaining and strengthening the denomination.
2. A long tradition and mindset, especially on the part of the leadership. It is difficult for most religious leaders to separate their interests from those of the Lord. They cannot even fathom that they could be wrong. It is almost impossible for them to know that they are wrong because they have rationalized through their beliefs in great detail.

3. A challenge to the "ordained" order. Who are you to challenge a person with a degree in divinity who has been ordained by the denominational hierarchy?

4. Satisfaction on the part of the followers. The main problem in most religious organizations is not the leadership. If you think about it, the leaders only exist if there are people who will follow. Thus, Paul warned Timothy (4:3-4): "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away [their] ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

5. When you seek book, chapter and verse for what is being practiced and taught, you will usually be seen as the enemy, the troublemaker. Recall that the basic premise that most denominations operate under is that this is not the basis for unity -- the basis for unity is to abandon the call for book, chapter and verse. Thus, expect to be labeled as evil (Isa 5:20): "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! For these reasons we urge those brave souls who attempt to initiate a transition within their organization and fail not to be discouraged. There is an alternative, and you are commanded to follow it (2Co 6:14-18): Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in [them]; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean [thing]; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. As we have demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, if the vast majority of a religious organization has no concern for the authority of Christ, they must be considered to be unbelievers, despite the fact that they might state emphatically that they are observing the authority of Christ. Stating it does not make it so. The proof is in the action, not the words (recall Mat 7:21-23 once again): Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Thus, once we identify the fact that we are is not having any success in moving our current organization in the direction toward God's word, we are duty bound and commanded by God to come out from them and separate ourselves for His service.

08.02.02 - Restoration

8.2.2 RESTORATION

Reformation has proved to be futile since Martin Luther attempted to reform the Roman Catholic church. Those who know the history of the Roman Catholic church recognize that it was not significantly altered by the reformation. Unfortunately, those denominations which were formed by the reformation were also attempts to reform the Roman Catholic church. They were not attempting to totally restore the church which Jesus created in the first century. As a consequence of this, they have all too many remnants of Roman Catholicism which are totally foreign to the New Testament. The alternative is a restoration of the practices which led to the establishment of the churches which existed in the first century. [Note that we do not say a restoration of the first century church, since that church has not ceased to exist (see Heb 12:18-24)]. We will describe the procedure by which you can accomplish this in this section. In the following section we will describe in more detail the nature of the churches which existed in the first century in order to understand just what it is that we are attempting to restore. The first step toward restoration is total and utter obedience to 2Co 6:17: "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean [thing]; and I will receive you..." Once the determination is made that the organization is not going to respond to the truth, anything short of a complete separation from that organization will be identified as fellowship (sharing). This will be recognized by both God and man. This is the reason that God gave this command. As long as there is an inference that Christians support an apostate religious organization in any way, there will be no way that they can influence members of that religious organization to disassociate themselves from it. It must be made clear, according to the principles which you can clearly state from the New Testament, that this organization is not attempting to teach the whole truth, therefore is not then under the authority of Christ, and therefore cannot be leading people to salvation. Any fellowship with such an organization by faithful Christians can only weaken their ability to lead individuals away from the clutches of this apostate organization. The second step is a most difficult one for many to make: seek and find others to work and worship with who have the same respect for the authority of Jesus as you do. I anticipate the first question to be: what church is that? Name the organization and we will join it! Unfortunately, it is not as easy as that. For, while those who abide by the authority of Christ will call themselves by a designation which can be found in the New Testament, the fact that someone calls themselves by one of these designations does not within itself guarantee that they are respecting the authority of the Lord. (This gets into the non-denomination aspect of the church which many find difficult to understand, and which we will discuss in the next section.) This step can take two possible turns: you either can find such a group with whom you can meet, or you cannot. For the sake of argument, let us assume that you believe that you have identified such a group. The next steps would be to visit with them, both their formal worship and with them as individuals. Learn everything that you can about them, especially with regard to their teachings and practice. If you are met with resistance or animosity in such an inquiry, then chances are you have not found a sound group. Those who are honestly endeavoring

to practice what the bible teaches will be overjoyed to discuss the reasons for doing everything that they do. This is not just in an effort to convince you that they are right -- it is also an honest inquiry of themselves, so that if you bring about a better understanding of an issue, they will change as their knowledge of the truth increases. A sound congregation will collectively be willing to change as they learn about their errors. Conversely, those who are overly defensive about the status quo and resist your inquiry are clearly putting their current practice above their desire to attain a better knowledge of God's word.

It is essential that we interject a qualifier here. It is the attitude of this group toward the authority of Christ and the scriptures that is important. There are any number of religious and even non-religious organizations who are filled with really good, friendly people. Faithfulness to the word of God is not measured solely by friendliness. Indeed, love is essential to the integrity of the group; however, love can be emulated in a variety of ways. True love holds the concern for the salvation of the visitor's soul as the greatest objective. While straight, hard gospel preaching is often seen to be judgmental and narrow minded by the world, the worst form of contempt and hatred is displayed by those who have no greater concern for your soul than to gloss over those words essential to your salvation. Such is self-serving hypocrisy. While we are not advocating undue offensiveness on the part of Christians, we are pleading for those who are evaluating various groups to "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24).

Once you are comfortable with the attitude of this group, it is essential that you become an integral part of them (Heb 10:25). Not only is this to obtain spiritual nourishment from them, but it is also your responsibility to provoke them to love and good works (Heb 10:24). The final step is to assure that this group remains faithful, which we will discuss further in Section 8.4.

We have not dealt with the possibility that it might be extremely difficult, or even impossible, to find a faithful group of Christians to meet with in your geographic area. We invite you to contact us and enlist our assistance in this regard; however, due to the essential autonomous nature of local churches, there is no way to assure that any given congregation is maintaining its integrity and moving in the direction of greater maturity and faithfulness. This determination must be made by the reader, and the selection of the group that you associate with is your responsibility. Remember, you are the victim of your environment (1Co 15:33: "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good morals.") However, the implication of this statement is that you have the ability to change your environment; thus, "come ye out from among them and be ye separate." These are individual responsibilities, and those who allow others to make these decisions for them are not looking out for their own souls. But what do you do if there is no sound group of Christians that you can associate with? The answer is simple: a group has to start somewhere. Thus, if it does not exist, start it. Jesus recognized that the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven was such that it would often be difficult to find. Thus, He stated to them (Mat 18:20): "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." We learn of many Christians in the first century that had "churches in their houses" (see Rom 16:5, 1Co 16:19, Col 4:15, Phm 1:2).

We recognize that this might seem quite uncomfortable and might be very difficult for those who have depended upon a denominational organization to facilitate their religious services from birth to death. It was also difficult for Abraham, when he was called out of his father's homeland and to go to a land that he knew not (Gen 12:1-4). Indeed, God is not a respecter of persons. When we

leave that which is familiar and do the will of God, we are exhibiting the same faith that Abraham had. Notice what the scriptures say in reference to this event (Rom 4:3): "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." As with Abraham, nothing short of your complete faith in God will get you through this period. But you will get through it! We suggest that you place the following ad in your local paper close to the religious section: "We are seeking others with total respect for the authority of Jesus as given in the New Testament to establish a new work for the Lord. We are meeting on Sunday morning at ... your address ...; if interested, please call ... your phone number." This will not go unnoticed by faithful Christians who will seek you out; nor will it go without a response consistent with the providence of God.

One of the reasons that this is such a strange action to most individuals is because of the misunderstanding of the nature of the Lord's church as organized on this earth. We have summarized this concern in the next section after which we will talk more about the trends of religious organizations and then bring our discourse to a close.

08.03 - The Nature of Local Churches

8.3 THE NATURE OF LOCAL CHURCHES The concept of the local church as described in the New Testament is diametrically opposed to what we see in the denominations. This produces a tremendous barrier to communication, since when we use the word church it produces an image in the mind of the hearer which is considerably different from that which is found in the New Testament.

We could write an entire book on this subject, looking at all of the uses of the word church throughout the New Testament, and comparing with all of the other words that are used to figuratively describe it: kingdom, bride of Christ, holy nation, elect, priesthood, etc., etc. To keep this section short, however, we are going to avoid this rigor and summarize. We hope after you have studied the scriptures from the other parts of this book (in their contexts) and gone on to your own private studies, that you will understand and appreciate the validity of the statements made in this section. Further, we would urge you to reread the entire New Testament, with special emphasis upon the book of Acts and the letters (Romans through Jude) to assure that the statements made here are valid. The general concept of the Lord's church as held by most denominations is that it consists of an ongoing, sanctioned, ordained organization of God which is tangible, has corporate offices, etc. Most central offices of the denominations, and certainly the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic church fulfill this expectation. Even those organizations which are outside of the denominational mainstream -- the huge radio and TV mega-churches -- fulfill this expectation for the vast majority of people. It gives them great comfort to be a part of something which is much larger than themselves. The only problem with this concept of the church is that this is totally a creation of man. When Jesus was confronted with the issue of defining just where his kingdom was, he responded with something that would sound very confusing today (Luk 17:20-21): "And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." The kingdom, which is the Lord's church, is not something that you join. There is no concept of "joining the church" in the New Testament. Read it through and verify this (as well as everything else being presented here) -- you will never find anyone joining the church. The reason is that the church, at least that part which we can see (i.e., the local church), does not pre-exist the conversion of Christians. We recognize that there is a universal church which consists of those saved throughout all time (Heb 12:18-24). However, this is never organized on this earth. There is never a gathering of the universal church, nor is there any attempt to organize churches above the local level. This can only be verified by reading through the New Testament -- we urge you to do just that! So where does this leave us? If the local church does not pre-exist Christians, then how is a local church formed. Read through the book of Acts and you will see that it was the seed of the word of God (see also Mat 13:1-23) which was planted. When that word was believed, those who were baptized became Christians and Christians only. Seeing their common cause, and the fact that God had ordained the local church to both evangelize (Mat 28:18-19) and to sustain their salvation

(Heb 10:24-25), they organized themselves as given by the authority of Christ through the apostles (e.g., see 1Ti 3:1-16 and Tit 1:1-16). The point is that there was no authority of man on this earth that ordained or sanctioned a given church. This is abundantly clear by a review of Gal 1:1-24 and 2, in which the apostle Paul is trying to make this very point. Paul's authority did not stem from Jerusalem or Rome -- it came directly from Christ! Denominations compromise this great truth by placing their organizations between man and his God -- between a congregation and their Lord. It is completely foreign to the sacred word of God and can do nothing but create a deterrent to one's faithfulness.

Thus, a church must be formed bottom up -- it cannot be imposed top down. When a faithful group of Christians associate themselves together as God ordained in the New Testament, this is exactly what God expects. It occurs in obedience to His word, and only in obedience to His word. Absolutely no organization of man needs to be involved; in fact, if such an organization is required according to some church doctrine, it does not fit the pattern of scripture -- it violates God's word (2Jn 1:9). The bottom-up nature of the local church fits the pattern exactly. Consider Heb 8:7-13, which essentially says that the church of the lord will be composed of believers and only believers. This cannot be said of top-down denominationally organized religious organizations. We know that this organization fosters all kinds of corruption from within. On the other hand, when a local church is formed by the collaboration of those whose only intent is to restore the doctrine and practice as given in the New Testament, this church has to be sound. [Sound implies the intent to do everything that the New Testament teaches and nothing else; it does not imply perfection in this regard.]

Now many will be mystified by such a loose organizational structure, and they will claim that it is impossible. Even when they see it in action, they will claim that there is some global organization. They cannot even accept it when they see it in reality. The proof is in a direct observation of reality. There are groups like this organized independently without any centralized authority of man all over the world. We can find them in virtually any country and in many if not most cities of this country. They have no other commonality than that they have accepted the word of God as being the final authority in all things. Yet their practices as far as worship, work and teaching are in many cases as uniform as that of many denominations who impose consistency top down. This proves that it not only can work, but it is working!

If you ask me to tell you what religious organization this is, I can only say that it is the church that you read about in the New Testament. If I were to attempt to lump all of these together and give them a name, I would be as guilty of denominating as any of the denominations have been. The burden of proof falls upon you, the reader, to find that organization which is sound and doing God's will -- or else to form such yourself. While I might be able to point you in the right direction if I have some knowledge of your geographical location, it is not my job to verify the doctrine and practice of every local congregation. That job is your's. All that I am submitting to you is that it not only is possible, it is a reality in most cities of the United States and most countries throughout the world. As a final proof that this process of individual effort toward determining the truth, consider the major reason that the Roman Catholic church and the denominations are able to take down such a large number of followers simultaneously. Is it not because they have linked all of their congregations under a common hierarchy? Thus, when the hierarchy goes bad, so does the entire denomination. And this fall is inevitably (1Pe 2:1-3): "But there were false prophets also among the

people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not."

If you have read this far, we are convinced that you see that this applies to the leadership of the denominations today. Ignoring God's plan for the independent organization of the local churches, they have led their members to believe all kinds of myths, the seven given in this book being only the beginning. Indeed, they have their followers thinking of the Lord's church as being a monstrous abomination, with multiple bodies, multiple heads, and God as the author of such confusion. Who can believe it? The solution is so very simple -- it is as simple as casting off the traditions of man and going back to God's word for all teaching, all work, all practice, and all worship.

Most members of denominations have been taught by their family, friends, religious leaders and popular lure that this is impossible. Indeed, if this were impossible there would be no local congregations at all who have, in absolute reality, abandoned all denominational affiliations, all creeds, and all traditions of man and have dedicated themselves to only practicing and teaching exactly what the bible teaches for us today. But there are hundreds if not thousands of such groups throughout this country and the world. This proves that the impossibility of unity within God's word is a myth. The fact that this is possible, and the fact that such is commanded of us (1Co 1:10, etc.) makes the restoration of the Lord's church a command to us today. Thus, any failure on our part to attempt to restore the Lord's church is sin. As one further proof of the validity of this claim, consider the fact that these congregations (local churches) have no organization greater than their own individual elders and deacons. That is, each one is autonomous and free to preach, teach and practice their religion as they see fit. This is the essence of free will. Nothing binds an individual to any given congregation -- each is free to come and go as their conscience dictates. Further, and more importantly, there is absolutely not common creed of doctrine other than the bible itself. And yet, the practices, worship and teachings of these churches do not vary significantly from one congregation to the next. I can go half way around the world, find a congregation true to God's word, and I will be worshipping and having fellowship with them in every other way. This, despite the fact that we might not have any common acquaintances, and we have never read any other common literature except the bible itself. This evidence flies in the face of those who teach and honestly believe that such is impossible. That people with nothing else in common but their common belief in Gods word would come to such unity of belief totally defies explanation if it were not ordained of God. This is the way that God wants His people to be organized. It is given that way in the New Testament. "How do I know; the bible tells me so."

08.04 - Reversing the Trend

8.4 REVERSING THE TREND This is not to say that these local churches are perfect. They are not. They are made up of men and women, and they have all of the weaknesses of men and women. They make mistakes and often they go astray of God's word. However, as long as they hold the word of God to be the only basis of unity and authority, they will return to it when their shortcomings are shown to them. Indeed, this is the major basis of determining fellowship (2Jn 1:9): "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into [your] house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

There is a trend within these churches to drift away from the word of God. This is no surprise to students of the bible. Many, if not most of the churches addressed in the New Testament had this same problem. Read through the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians. We have quoted the warnings with regard to false teachers over and over again. As long as churches are made up of people, they will have their problems. Is this evidence that the word of God is not sufficient and that we must accept the denominational model? Absolutely not! Consider Rom 3:1-3, which discusses the fact that the Jews of Jesus' time had the advantage of the scriptures despite the fact that they did not observe them properly: "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit [is there] of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged." The point is that you cannot judge the truth by those who claim to have it, or even by those who faithfully endeavor to keep it. Man will let you down every time.

I will admit that the paragraphs above might sound contradictory. First we said that the uniformity of the churches who are dedicated to following only God's word is evidence that the bible pattern can be attained. Then we indicated that these same churches have a tendency to drift away from God's word. How can these two assertions be rectified? Quite simply, we must realize that churches, like people, are not uniform in their maturity. The fact that a person achieves a degree of righteousness proves that this degree of righteousness can be attained. The fact that that very same person falls into sin does not negate the first proof. The spiritual maturity of a church, of course, depends totally upon the spiritual maturity of its members. No church ever stands still. Usually a church is first formed by a small, very dedicated group of individuals who are dissatisfied with their current religious organization. They may have tried for years to convince those in their previous organization of the truth. Finally, convinced themselves that their efforts are not bearing fruit, they obey the command to "... come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean [thing]; and I will receive you, ..." (1Co 6:17).

These individuals seek and find others who share their desire to base their religion solely on God's word. As such, they are highly blessed in their efforts to keep the Lord's great commission. The small church of two or three increased to ten or twenty. Over the course of a generation it might grow to number in the hundreds. This is the tricky part, for here we have replicated either the church at Corinth, or else the church at Smyrna (see Rev 2:8-11) -- one was headed toward destruction, the other holding the course and obviously growing in spirituality. Certainly the same conditions can exist in any church today. This is the reason that we cannot stake our salvation upon a name or a group. For, the very same group can be removed from grace by God himself. The responsibility to reverse the trend away from God's word falls upon each one of us, as indicated by the warning issued to the church at Ephesus (Rev 2:5): "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

08.05 - Some Concluding Thoughts

8.5 SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We need to conclude right where we began: with an appeal to the authority of the word of God. These things are irrelevant if you still feel that the bible cannot be understood, or that it cannot be understood alike, or that it is not the absolute and ultimate authority by which God has communicated with us. However, if you are convinced that God has given us His word to "thoroughly furnish us unto every good work," then you are compelled to leave the system of myths propagated by the denominations and find others who have the same faith that you have -- a faith that is sufficient to enable us to be like Abraham, "... when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb 11:8).

Indeed, the decision to leave the religious environment of one's lifetime is a leap which requires as much faith as Abraham had. God is not a respecter of persons; he expects us to reject sin, even if all of our friends and relatives are steeped in it. But before you start feeling sorry for yourself, listen to the words of Jesus (Mark 10:29-30): And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. From this we can see that salvation is a matter of faith, not works. For, if we receive even on this earth a hundredfold more than we sacrifice, how can we think that it could possibly be earned. But the further implication of this verse is that, generally, we will have to leave many of the things that we hold most dear if, in fact, they are not consistent with our following Jesus.

So, where does this leave us? Our relationship with God must come first. Absolutely nothing should get in the way of this service. This is the reason that Jesus said: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mat 18:20). If we want Jesus in our midst, let us do everything in His name, which means by His authority. If that means that we are only two or three, so be it. But recognize the following as well: "For where two or three thousand are gathered together in any other than my name, I will not be in their midst."

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net