



SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

SALVATION

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Salvation is the means by which God, through Christ, saves man from the penalty of sin and gives him eternal life. This process includes one's calling, repentance, baptism, justification, receiving of the Holy Spirit, life of faith and obedience, and final birth into God's Kingdom as a spirit being. Salvation is a freely given gift from God through grace, with our ultimate reward given according to our works.

Matthew 16:27; John 3:16–17; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8–9; Hebrews 6:1–2

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The goal of every Christian is to be saved from the death penalty of sin through the sacrifice of Christ and to receive the gift of eternal life in God's family and kingdom. This goal and process by which it is attained is called salvation. It is the ultimate purpose of life and the explicit reason why mankind was created.

God created man in His image and after His likeness. But the creation process will not be complete until mankind is perfected spiritually—has perfect godly character created in him—and actually enters the God family. God initiates this process by “calling” a person—opening his mind to understand, grasp, and be convicted by the truth of the Bible. It is impossible for anyone to come to Christ unless the Father calls him (Jn. 6:44), and God's calling “depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy” (Rom. 9:16).

If one responds to the realization of God's truth by believing it, committing oneself to it and by acting upon it, God will grant him the miracle of true repentance (Rom. 2:4). Repentance is the state of mind that an individual attains through seeing and acknowledging his past sinful way of life and by recognizing he has broken God's laws (Rom. 3:23; 1 Jn. 3:4), resolving to do so no longer. Repentance includes both a deep (“godly”) sorrow over past wrongs (2 Cor. 7:10) and a steadfast determination to change the whole direction of one's life from disobedience to obedience of God. It is accompanied by a profound realization of the need for forgiveness and the help and strength from God to change it.

Once a person has repented and professed a sincere faith in the person, message, and sacrifice of Christ, he may be baptized by total immersion for the forgiveness of sins. This baptism is a type of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, which is our means of reconciliation to God (Rom. 5:10) since He paid the death penalty for our sins. Baptism symbolizes the death and burial of one's old sinful way of life and the beginning of a totally new spirit-led life of obedience and submission to God (Rom. 6:3–6; Col. 2:12–13). After baptism the new convert receives the Holy Spirit through the ceremony of the “laying-on-of-hands” ceremony performed in accordance with the commands and examples of the apostles (Acts 8:12–17; 19:5–6).

God's Spirit is an absolute necessity for the spiritual creation process of salvation as it serves many functions. It begets one as the son of God; it strengthens him to face trials and tests, to overcome problems, and to build godly character; and it converts and changes the person's whole direction of mind from being carnal to being spiritual (Rom. 8). As such, the Holy Spirit is the seed of eternal life within us that, at the resurrection, will transform our mortality to immortality and clothe us with eternal life (Rom. 8:11; 2 Cor. 5:1–5). It is the Christian's guarantee of eternal life, which can only

be negated by willful neglect or deliberate rejection.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is clearly the focal point of the salvation process. He was “put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). We “were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Rom. 5:10) and are thereby justified through faith in that reality (Rom. 5:1). Yet salvation must go beyond justifying the past; it must continue into the future throughout one’s life (Rom. 3:24; Titus 3:4–7). The true Christian is admonished to “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). Indeed, the active participation of Jesus Christ in one’s life through His Holy Spirit is absolutely essential for ultimate salvation. As Romans 5:10 concludes, “much more, being reconciled, *we shall be saved by His life.*”

In Scripture, there is a key point about the salvation process that some people may not want to see. Scripture says about Jesus, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is *no other name* under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). There is only *one* path to salvation, and the one path is not “living a good life” or being a good person. Nor is it Buddhism, Islam, or *any other* religion. Only by accepting Jesus’ sacrifice can one be saved—He is the only way! Romans 14:10–12 points out that every knee will bow to Jesus, since all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Jesus will show every other religion and philosophy to be *empty* where salvation is concerned. Truly, every human will be given a chance to realise that *while we were sinners*, Jesus gave his life for us—to give us a path to salvation (Rom. 5:8) and powerfully show God’s love for *all* mankind.

This whole salvation process is by “grace” (Greek “favor”—Eph. 2:8)—it is *unmerited* and *freely given* by God and cannot in any way be earned. The Christian totally depends upon God’s grace, initially for the forgiveness of past sins and sins he may commit subsequent to baptism (Rom. 3:24–26; 8:1). Nevertheless, the individual must meet certain criteria in order to be given this free gift.

First, the person must live by and grow in faith—a total and real conviction. One must have faith that God exists; faith that He will perform all of His biblical promises, including that of granting him salvation (Rom. 4); faith that the death of Jesus Christ will pay the penalty for one’s sins and reconcile him to God; and faith that the resurrection of the living Jesus Christ will enable him to attain eternal life.

Furthermore, a Christian must not be disobedient, since continual sin that is not repented of disqualifies one from God’s kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9–11). Salvation is surely not earned by obedience, because salvation can in no way be earned (cf. Rom. 4:4). However, Christ’s response when asked what must be done in order to be saved was that the commandments must be kept (Mt. 19:17). Furthermore, Christ told His disciples, at the resurrection He shall “reward every man according to his works” (Mt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12).

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 also illustrates why obedience and good works are necessary. Although salvation is a freely given gift (and hence is “by grace”), our individual responsibilities within God’s family and kingdom shall vary according to the way we have lived our lives since baptism. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 shows plainly we will receive responsibilities in direct proportion to the way we have conducted our lives with the God-given talent we’ve been given.

Today, relative few are responding to God’s calling, but now is not the only day of salvation. Every human being who has ever lived shall have an opportunity for the greatest free gift that could ever be imagined. God wants all mankind to receive the opportunity for salvation (1 Tim. 2:4) and is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). To this end, God is infinitely patient and has appointed a time for every human that has ever lived to be called by Him and given the ultimate opportunity of eternal life in the family of God.

In summary, salvation is by grace, through faith; it’s not earned by obedience but is dependent upon obedience, with the degree of our ultimate reward determined by our works. This salvation process is one that demands our continuance in God’s way and necessitates our endurance to the end (Mt. 10:22; 24:13). Only when that process is complete and we have been finally born as spirit beings into the family of God shall salvation be complete and totally achieved.

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FAITH

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Faith is the absolute sure knowledge that God exists and that He will accomplish those things He has promised. Faith in God—trust in His promises and belief that He is in overall control—is a major characteristic in the Christian life and is absolutely necessary for salvation.

Romans 1:17; 10:17; Ephesians 3:17; Hebrews 11:1–2; James 2:22–24

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

“The just shall live by his faith.” These words were uttered first by the prophet Habakkuk and quoted three times by the apostle Paul. Living faith is at the heart of true Christianity. It is absolutely essential for salvation (1 Pet. 1:5–9). Christ described faith as a weightier matter of the law (Mt. 23:23). Paul listed it among the three greatest Christian virtues (along with hope and love). Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Far from being simply a feeling in his heart, the Christian’s faith motivates his entire pattern of living. Faith functions as the fulcrum of true Christian thought and behavior.

The two distinct meanings of the word “faith” are found in the English translation. When preceded by the definite article (“the faith”) it means the overall system of doctrine and belief accepted by the Church, and by extension, the Church itself (Acts 6:7; 13:8; 14:22). When used without the article it means “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1), which perhaps is the clearest biblical definition of faith. Faith is an absolute belief that God exists and a total trust in His statements (Heb. 11:6).

Ultimately, faith deals with God’s promises—with the future. It is the trust in “things not seen.” Of course, belief cannot be blind. It must be built on genuine conviction. It has to come from perceiving God’s hand in creation, His work in history, and the experience of His fulfilled promises in one’s own life. This is the *foundation* of faith. But one does not

need faith in what has already been accomplished. Therefore, faith is the willingness to believe God will not fail even though He has not actually fulfilled what is promised (Heb. 11:1).

True faith must come from God and has many facets, though the primary ones relate directly to Jesus Christ. Faith in its simplest but most profound manifestation is a deep personal belief in Jesus Christ, that He is our Savior, and that His death paid the individual penalty for our personal sins. Faith is having full confidence in the message Jesus brought. This faith in Christ is the belief that leads us to baptism. (Baptism is merely an outward symbolic expression that we have inward faith in Christ.) Paul speaks of this faith in Galatians 2:16 when he remarks we “have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ.”

After baptism, one receives God’s Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. At this point Christ, through the Spirit, lives in us and empowers us with a growing and internalized godly faith. Since faith is *not* self-generated, but is rather the faith of Christ’s Spirit in us, it is termed the “faith of Christ” (subjective genitive). It is this faith of Christ that we must express and live by in every facet of life.

But faith is not an end in itself. It is rather the vehicle by which we may obtain salvation. Of course, salvation cannot be earned—either by obedience or faith—for nothing man can do would obligate God to grant salvation had He not decided to give man this gift by His own volition (and according to certain terms). But God has obligated Himself to grant salvation if one has living faith. God says the presence of this faith is counted as righteousness in His eyes and indeed justifies us before God (Rom. 4:1–7).

Faith is the *motivator* that causes us to live godly lives. One who has real belief and hope in God’s promises will demonstrate this fidelity by his actions and obedience. Indeed, “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23).

The true Christian will obey God and do good works, for “faith without works is dead” (Jas. 2:20). Our good works do not save us, but they do demonstrate faith. James wrote, “I will show you my faith by my works” (Jas. 2:18), directly contradicting the notion that faith can maintain an exclusively mental/spiritual existence devoid of any physical action and behavior. One who does not obey God is said to possess “dead” faith, a trait no better than that of the

demons who themselves believe God exists but refuse to obey Him (Jas. 2:19). Real and true faith will compel a Christian to action.

To have real living faith does not mean one will never doubt. Doubt is a normal human characteristic and emotion, and even the truly begotten Christian is not immune from it. Yet we must contest doubt, not by deluding ourselves but by rehearsing reality. We should return to the fundamentals of biblical belief, to our first love, by thinking thoughts and doing the works we did when originally converted. Doubt should not undermine faith, for true faith can surmount doubt.

God commands, “the just shall live by faith” in every facet and area of his life. One must fully live by faith, because God made promises that affect virtually every part of man’s existence. He has promised to help us in trials if we are faithful and to answer every prayer that is prayed according to His will and in faith. These expressions of faith are again not ends in themselves. Actually they are secondary when compared to a Christian’s main thrust of faith, which is the belief in God’s promise of the salvation by the resurrection from the dead. Other areas of faith are important, but only as they contribute to our faith in the resurrection, which underscores eternal life. Paul says one who does not earnestly hope for the resurrection has “faith in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14), because if we have no hope of being resurrected, then we have no hope at all! It is a Christian’s faith in the resurrection from the dead that provides a powerful motivation to his earthly actions. It is this faith and hope that encourages, motivates, and compels the Christian to press onward toward this salvation in spite of trials and disappointments.

God’s ultimate design is to bring every human being from the human level to the divine level—from flesh to spirit—from a temporary physical existence to an eternal spiritual existence. This is the foremost frontier of faith. It involves the development of character by implementing the use of trials and a variety of experiences in our human life. God’s promises for the “good life” on the physical level are always subordinated to His ultimate purpose of fulfilling His main promise on the spiritual level—because, for God, it is all about our spiritual development.

Jesus makes a powerful statement about faith that puzzles some Christians today. “So Jesus said to

them, ‘...assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you”’ (Mt. 17:20). We believe Jesus, because we know that “with God all things are possible” (Mt. 19:26)! We also know that God is working out His plan here on earth and that not everything we humans want is good for us, or good for fulfilling God’s plan in our personal lives. For example, we see that Paul was not healed though he had prayed for healing (2 Cor. 12:7); and yet, Paul explains that God had a purpose for this “thorn in the flesh”—it was to prevent him from being “exalted above measure.” Millions of people pray that they would win a lottery; yet Scripture says it is hard for a rich man to enter God’s Kingdom, because cares for riches can choke away one’s time and relationship with God. A loving God will not destroy His child by giving him foolish or excessive things that would corrupt him. Perhaps one of our greatest statements of faith is expressed in the request, “Thy will be done” (Mt. 6:10), which shows God that we trust His wisdom and vision of what is best for us. Faith that moves mountains can be hyperbole, and it can be metaphor, and perhaps someday there will be a mountain in the way, and God will grant one of his children to move it “from here to there” just to demonstrate what faith in God can really do.

A Christian who is living by faith realizes physical promises may be delayed for his spiritual benefit, but he knows his life is absolutely in God’s hands and is assured that God has our best interests at heart. Some by their faith have been delivered, while others by the same faith have been martyred (Heb. 11) or allowed to die without seeing the ultimate fruit of their endeavors in this life. Only God knows why these differences occur. We have no choice but to allow God those prerogatives.

“Faith” in Galatians 5:22 should be translated “faithfulness.” The “fruits” are produced in the lives of people who have the Spirit. The Spirit does not infuse any of these fruits within us; we produce them by following the Spirit’s instructions, which are spelled out for us in the Spirit-inspired Scriptures. The faith required for salvation is our own faith; it is not a gift that is supernaturally infused within us (there is a special gift of faith—1 Cor. 12:9—but that’s different from “saving faith”), though God may use and even cause events in our

lives to bring us to belief in Him and His promises.

Faith should never be static but must compel and be active, expecting, constantly growing and expanding in every aspect and area of life. This faith may be built and grow in different ways, through experience, through trials (Rom. 5:1–5), by reading the inspired Word of God (Rom. 10:17), through interaction with the faith of others, etc. Faith must be constant, unfeigned, based upon true promises, without time limit, consistently growing and being exercised, but always vigilant in guarding against drawing back (Heb. 10:38).

The Bible spotlights and illustrates how the faith of the patriarchs and people of God throughout history are examples of encouragement to us. We are told of Abraham, the father of the faithful. We are reminded of Enoch, Elijah, Samson, Jephthah, David, and the prophets. We see the awesome example of Jesus Christ Himself, who gave up and willingly surrendered His exalted position as God, emptied Himself into a human form, and was sacrificed in faith, so that He could become the Savior of mankind after the Father resurrected Him. Likewise, we look at the examples of the apostles and of fellow brethren who were martyred for the sake of Jesus Christ. Finally, we learn that God will grant these faithful men salvation and eternal life in God's kingdom, because they *believed* they would receive it, and because they had *real faith*. They will receive the reward they hoped for, because they believed that God existed and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). Our task is to follow their example, endure in faith until the end, and receive this same reward.

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REPENTANCE

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Repentance is the act of acknowledging one's sins and resolving to fully obey God. To repent means to

change one's overall attitude from wanting to go one's own way and instead wanting to go God's way. It begins when God opens one's mind to see oneself in comparison with God and His law. True repentance is the first step toward reconciliation with God, and thereby ultimately toward salvation.

Acts 2:38; 3:19–21; 8:22; 1 John 3:4

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Repentance signals the start of a changed and godly life. It involves a fully conscious recognition of one's sinful, lawless way of life, a way of life naturally antagonistic toward God and His law, accompanied by a firm conviction to make a total change and to begin to live in full accord with God's way of life as described in the Bible.

True repentance can occur only when God Himself opens one's eyes to see his past sinfulness by *granting repentance* (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). But repentance is much more than recognition of personal sins. Rather, repentance is the process through which God leads us so that we can become progressively more like Him, thereby proceeding toward salvation as sons and daughters in His divine family which is God's ultimate desire for all humanity. As such, repentance should include the positive, joyful realization of the fact that it is *God who grants repentance*, that this repentance is unto life" (Acts 11:18), and that all who are so called shall "come to know the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25).

True repentance is a complex and deeply personal phenomenon that can only be understood, in the final analysis, by experiencing it. The first component is the realization that there is a vast difference, a great gulf, between God and oneself (e.g. Job 42). The next aspect is an all-consuming desire to close that gap, to become more like God in character, thought, and behavior, though the capacity to accomplish this is far beyond human power alone and requires the active involvement of God's Holy Spirit.

One who is coming to repentance must first understand that sin is the transgression of God's law (1 Jn. 3:4), the penalty for which is death (Rom. 6:23). Added to this general definition of sin must be the deep personal realization that one has indeed sinned and his whole frame of mind and attitude of

approach is oriented against God's law (Rom. 8:7). But the deceitfulness of sin can blind one from seeing one's sinfulness unless God opens one's mind. God's Spirit works with our mind/spirit to help us to recognize our sins and the need for repentance. The blindness results from practicing the shutting of one's eyes to one's own sinfulness. "Their eyes they have shut!" (Mt. 13:14–15). This habit can lead to the inability, or at least a seriously compromised ability, to discern right from wrong. Therefore, genuine repentance must come from God Himself, and man cannot claim credit for it, though he has a part in it. Clearly, his part is to acknowledge the truth about himself which God has revealed and then to act upon it.

In the process of seeing himself, he comes to realize the human "heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). Since sin ultimately starts in the mind, he also begins to understand his own righteousness—which in an unconverted person is invariably motivated by selfishness—is considered by God as a "dirty rag" (Is. 64:6). When an individual repents, he must compare his righteousness to God's righteousness and not to that of other human beings. When man compares himself to God—and with God's help sees himself as he really is—he is astonished at his own sinfulness and inadequacy.

Confronted with this reality, the person nearing repentance comes to appreciate that man is incapable of leading a godly life without God's direct help and intervention through His Spirit. "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). While man's intentions are often the best—he may want to do good—nevertheless, he finds himself caught in a struggle between them and his natural inclination toward evil. Romans 7 describes this struggle: "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I... For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (vv. 15–18). A person who is repentant feels a strong need for help in this spiritual dilemma and reaches out to God for aid through His Holy Spirit. Thus, Paul admits that the only relief from this eternal conflict between the good of God and the evil of our own nature is "through Jesus Christ" (v. 25).

In his natural state without God's Spirit, man is

cut off from God and indeed at enmity with God (Rom. 8:7; Is. 59:1–2). The story of Adam and Eve is an example of how this spiritual enmity occurred in man (Rom. 5:12). The Genesis account indicates that Adam and Eve were born morally neutral, with the ability to do good *or* evil, right *or* wrong, but without an actual inclination toward either. God nonetheless instructed them in His law and explained to them right from wrong. They had no reason to doubt God or disobey until Satan materialized in Genesis 2 as a *nachash* (a whispering spirit, an enchanter), tempting them by saying God was both holding back knowledge from them and lying about death as the penalty for disobedience. Adam and Eve chose to obey Satan rather than God and ate of the forbidden fruit. The effects of this sin cut them off from God as is evidenced by His thrusting them from the garden. It also caused them to rationalize, thereby blinding them to, their sin, illustrated by Adam's attempt to justify himself. Likewise, their act of stepping from the realm of moral neutrality to that of sinfulness through the initiation of this one sin caused deep and profound mental changes in Adam and Eve. They were no longer morally neutral but instead evilly oriented in much the same way as was—and is—Satan, since Satan's attitude of mind had now influenced their own.

All human beings are, like Adam and Eve, born morally neutral. Yet living in Satan's world, surrounded by an ungodly environment, eventually everyone will sin, as did Adam and Eve. (To ask at what age or to try to discern the demarcation line between moral neutrality and sin is not practical.) Thus, sin has the same consequences in us as it did in Adam and Eve. It cuts us off from God, blinds us to our own sinfulness, and changes our minds from neutrality to enmity toward God (Rom. 8:7).

Viewed in this context, repentance is the bridge between a carnal mind, one that is at enmity against God, and a spiritual mind, one that has God's Spirit and is obedient and pleasing to the Creator. When one repents, he sees for the first time in his life the ungodly, debilitating, wicked orientation of his natural mind; he asks God for forgiveness and is baptized. He then receives the Holy Spirit which, working in and through his mind, actually changes or "transforms" it from carnal to spiritual (Rom. 12:2). This transformation is called "conversion." And repentance is the bridge—the first step—in this process of transformation.

Although repentance involves seeing the sinful side of oneself, which generates negative feelings, it nevertheless has extremely positive aspects. Upon true repentance and baptism, one is forgiven of sin. The psalmist said, “Blessed is the man to whom sin is not imputed” (Ps. 32:2). The sheer joy of having one’s sins forgiven is the sure knowledge of being right and clean before God. King David bore testimony to the positive, uplifting nature of repentance when he prayed, “Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which though hast broken [as a result of my sin] may rejoice” (Ps. 51:8). One who has repented can rejoice at the impending forgiveness of his sins, it is joy indeed.

The most profound evocation of real repentance in the Bible must truly be this heartfelt prayer of David in Psalm 51. The occasion was Nathan the prophet’s coming to him about his sin with Bathsheba. The prayer shows the important basic components of godly repentance: an attitude of abject wretchedness and contrite humility before God; a deep recognition of all one’s sins, which are “ever before me”; the conviction that God can and will forgive an individual’s iniquities and cleanse him from all his sins; and finally, the sure knowledge that God can and will create in a truly repentant individual “a clean heart” and put “a new and right spirit” in him, restoring “the joy of your salvation.”

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment” (Ps. 51:1–4).

“Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit” (Ps. 51:9–12).

Unquestionably, Godly repentance must be accompanied by “godly sorrow.” Godly sorrow

reflects a profound awareness that one has sinned against God. It is a sorrow that is felt because sin hurts others and works against God’s master plan of salvation. It is this “godly sorrow” that produces a repentance that leads to salvation” (2 Cor. 7:9–10).

On the other hand, God also speaks of “worldly sorrow.” Worldly sorrow is not sorrow that one has committed sin, but just a momentary feeling brought on by adverse consequences such as results after one has been caught and is being punished. It is temporary self-pity, in no way involving permanent change from sinning to obedience, and its end is death.

True repentance, conversely, is a deep-seated desire to change one’s whole being. It is a desire to reform and redirect one’s motivational approach to life. It is coming to abhor sin as God does. This type of repentance can come only from God. As we have seen, it is God who must give and lead one to repentance (Rom. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25).

In a more detailed way, repentance includes many things. It involves a profound sense of utter helplessness, realizing that to do what must be done is impossible by one’s own willpower. It requires the conscious awareness that God must take an active part in redirecting and reshaping one’s life, for only God knows the way to life and only He can solve the problems of mankind. We must come to realize this fact and accept the process by which we can become acceptable to God. We have to change from doing things our own way to acknowledging God, His will and His laws in our lives. This means a desire to change our very hearts and minds. We have to turn from our way of lust, greed, selfishness, and self-centeredness to God’s way of mercy, generosity, love, and outgoing concern for others (Eph. 4:22–24). We can view this as a spiritual “mind transplant.” We have to adopt new ways of thinking, new feelings and attitudes (2 Cor. 5:17).

Repentance, however, is not designed to create total uniformity of personality, tastes, interests, life styles, etc., among Christians. Such would be an anathema to God, who is creating true sons in His family, not the proverbial “rows of yellow pencils.” Repentance, in fact, is the means by which human beings can grow to have the same overall attitudes and character of God. This is the overwhelmingly uplifting result of godly sorrow.

Paul lists seven attributes of this godly sorrow. “For see what earnestness this godly grief has pro-

duced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter” (2 Cor. 7:11). This type of sorrow generates real repentance which will lead to salvation.

Real repentance is a spiritual gift, and only God can give it. Acts 11:18 informs us that “God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.” How does God grant people “repentance to [eternal] life”? By seeing to it that they hear the gospel. One cannot change (repent) unless one knows what to change from/to. It’s a “spiritual” gift in the sense that this gift of repentance (which comes by way of the gospel) pertains to spiritual things—things like eternal life. Human remorsefulness, even accompanied by great emotion, is not the repentance the Bible says is a prerequisite for baptism and salvation. Consequently, an individual desiring to be converted must ask God for a repentant attitude of mind as well as for forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. This conscious act of *asking God* is an essential part of the process.

As is commonly known, true repentance must be followed by water baptism, which results in the forgiveness of one’s sins by God and the consequent reception of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands of the ministry.

Although one’s initial act of repentance occurs prior to baptism, repentance is not a one-time event—it must be a continuous lifelong process. The more one learns about God and His way, the more one becomes aware of how far he must go to be like God. As a converted individual seeks God’s way and reads God’s Word to receive personal correction, so his inner sinful attitudes and motivations are perceived. This continuous process of growth and change is the very essence of the Christian life. As God opens his mind to see more clearly (even more than before baptism) his sinful nature, the Christian repents more profoundly. His post-conversion repentance is a continuous reaffirmation of his commitment to live God’s way as well as being contrite and remorseful for any errors made.

Repentance is not synonymous with perfection. A repentant person is not guaranteed a sinless life for ever after. Even a converted person will sin out of weakness from time to time, but he need only repent of that sin and confess before God, acknowledging Christ’s atoning sacrifice once again, in

order to restore contact with God and to obtain God’s full forgiveness which reestablishes the joy of righteousness. Such a repentant person knows God shall completely forgive all his sins upon repentance. He knows God has willed to actually forget (cease to think of or consider) all our iniquities once they have been repented of and put under Christ’s blood. “As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12). God “forgets” our sins by no longer associating them with us. This is the incredible promise of real repentance—real freedom: freedom from guilt and fear, freedom from anxiety and depression, freedom from sins, freedom from eternal death. It is the reason why true repentance is the most encouraging, beneficial gift God can give us. It is with this confidence that the Christian continues to suppress and overcome his human nature with God’s help. He asks God to replace his ungodly thoughts with the godly approach of the Holy Spirit; he seeks to diligently understand God’s law more comprehensively through the practical experience of obedience.

God emphatically warns—and it should not be taken lightly—that “it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold Him up to contempt” (Heb. 6:4–6). This shows that anyone wilfully rejecting God by adamantly refusing to follow His way cannot be coerced into repentance and cannot be forced to receive eternal life. Yet, diametrically contradicting the unfortunate concept of a harsh and vengeful God is the astonishing, thrilling biblical truth that all who *want* to repent *can* repent at *any time*, for any sin, with the full assurance of God’s total and immediate forgiveness through Jesus Christ our Savior. God does *not* want any human being to perish “but that all should reach repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9).

In summary, repentance involves a change of one’s whole way of life and frame of mind from disobedience and antagonism toward God to obedience and love toward God. It is the bridge that takes one from worldliness to godliness, from wickedness to uprightness, from the way of “get” (selfishness,

self-concern, vanity) to the way of “give” (selflessness, outgoing concern, service). All this is only possible through God’s Holy Spirit already working in the lives of thousands of Christians. God’s gift of repentance is a great miracle that shall eventually work in the lives of billions around the world.

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BAPTISM

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The ceremony of water baptism is performed by immersion for the forgiveness of sins upon true repentance and acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice. After this ceremony, and as a result of the laying on of hands, one receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Baptism symbolizes the renunciation of the past sinful way of life, the burial of the old man in a watery grave, and the emergence of a new Spirit-led man living with Christ’s mind and following in His footsteps.

Matthew 3:13–16; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:1–8; Colossians 2:12

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The New Testament stresses great importance upon the ceremony and symbolism of water baptism. It is a deeply-meaningful initiatory rite referred to in Hebrews 6:1 as one of the *foundational doctrines* of the Christian belief. John the Baptist is the one who introduced water baptism as a ceremony through which one outwardly demonstrates his inward attitude of repentance and desire to submit to God.*

* We know that at one time baptism accompanied circumcision as a means of entry into Judaism for the proselyte. This would explain why the Jews who came to John’s baptism seemed to already have some familiarity with the rite.

Christ placed His stamp of approval upon John’s baptism by setting the example of undergoing the ritual Himself (Mt. 3:13–17). The Father likewise expressed His favor with Jesus’ baptism by saying through an angel immediately afterwards that Jesus was His beloved Son in whom He was “well pleased” (v. 17). Jesus’ disciples continued to baptize like John until the death and resurrection of their master, when the practice took on newer and deeper significance. (John’s baptism did not make available the Holy Spirit—it was a baptism only unto repentance. Later we have an example which shows the necessity of rebaptism in the name of Jesus because some had undergone only the baptism of John—Acts 19:1–6. Also illustrated and stressed in this narrative is the importance of the laying on of hands. This is further substantiated in Acts 8:14–18, where individuals were baptised in the name of Jesus, but without hands laid on them.)

In Matthew 28:19–20, Jesus commanded that the apostles go into all nations preaching the gospel and baptizing disciples into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They followed Christ’s command stressing the importance of baptism and carefully explained its meaning in their preaching and teachings. Acts 2:38 is a fundamental scripture in this regard: “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 Ghost.” This clearly explains one must be baptized in order to have his sins forgiven so he may receive God’s Holy Spirit through the laying-on-of-hands ceremony (Acts 8:12–17).

There is *no salvation* through any other person or savior than Jesus Christ. The Bible says, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is *no other name* under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The Scriptures tell us that Jesus baptized more disciples than John (John 3:22; 4:1). But in actual fact we find it was not Jesus that did the work of baptizing these people, but it was His disciples that did it for Him (John 4:2). When the repentant believers were baptized, they were baptized “in the name of Jesus”—in other words, *by His authority*. When you do anything in another’s name you do it by his express permission. The disciples of Jesus did the baptizing for Him, by His authority and in His name, and that was the same as if Jesus actually did it Himself. Ministers of Jesus Christ do all things in His name (Acts 10:48).

In Matthew 28:19, we find repentant believers are to be baptized “in” the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The inspired Greek word translated “in” is *eis*. This word actually means *into*. The one who is baptized becomes the possession of, and comes under the protection of, the one whose name he bears. Therefore, Matthew 28:19 should be translated: “...baptizing them *into* the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” It is done in the name, *by the authority*, of Jesus Christ. When God’s ministers baptize in the name of Jesus Christ, they are not baptizing the baptismal candidate into any humanly devised organization or denomination, but into the very *God Family*, into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The main prerequisites for water baptism are repentance and belief (i.e., faith) in the *person* and *message* of Jesus Christ. Repentance includes godly sorrow over one’s past sins and wrong way of life and a deep conviction to obey God. To believe in the person of Jesus Christ means one believes Christ was indeed the Son of God, Savior, and Messiah. In Acts 8:37 it is noted Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch upon his declared conviction, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

But this general belief about the person of Jesus Christ must be more specific before baptism. One must come to acknowledge, accept, and desire Christ as his personal Savior—he must fully and deeply *believe* Jesus’ death on the cross was to pay for his (the sinner’s) own, individual sins. Thus, the faith in Christ required for baptism is much more personal than merely a general belief in God or a theoretical understanding (however accurate) of New Testament theology. One who has this faith in Christ and His sacrifice will demonstrate his true conviction and belief by his actions. He will begin to obey Christ, “Not everyone 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” (Mt. 7:21). Peter said, God will give His Holy Spirit only to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). The apostle James also makes it abundantly plain that faith and works go hand in hand (Jas. 2:16 ff).

In addition to having belief or faith in the person of Christ, one needs belief or faith in the *message* of Jesus Christ which is the gospel. It would make no sense to believe Christ was the Savior yet disregard His message. Christ Himself commanded that all repent and believe the gospel (Mk. 1:15). So those

who want to be baptized must not only be convinced of Christ as Savior of the world and Savior of their own personal life, but he *must* also believe the gospel. In every way this faith points “toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).

Before baptism one *must be* deeply aware of the significance the act of baptism will have on one’s life. He must understand baptism symbolizes a break with the old way of life and demonstrates a *full* commitment and determination to begin a new way of life—that of obeying God. One who is baptized can *never* go back to the old way, or else he stands in jeopardy of losing out on eternal life and consequently being consumed in the lake of fire. One who is considering baptism should carefully “count the cost” that he has the *depth* of conviction and fortitude to put Christ *first* in his life, even *before* family and friends (Lk. 14:25–33).

Upon such true repentance and faith, a representative of Jesus Christ can baptize the person. The baptism is by complete immersion in accordance with the many New Testament examples of baptism and with the meaning of baptism itself.

There is only one proper method of baptism described in the Bible. The word “baptize” comes from the Greek word *baptizo*, which means “immerse,” “dip,” “plunge into,” or “put into.” Many churches today practice baptism by sprinkling and pouring, even though the Greek words which normally indicate these actions are not used when referencing baptism in the New Testament. Usage of the time indicates the word has its classical meaning of “immerse.” Complete submersion in water is the proper way to picture death and burial, which Romans 6 explains is a major symbolic meaning and illustration of what it is to be baptized correctly (see below).

In addition, the mode used by John the Baptist and Christ’s disciples illustrated there must have been a physical similarity in their general baptismal procedures. The scriptural descriptions of certain baptisms reinforce that the method was total immersion. Christ was baptized in the Jordan, and upon baptism, *came out* of the water (Mt. 3:13–17); John baptized in Aenon because there was “much water” there (Jn. 3:23); Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch travelled in the chariot until they came to waters in general, and both went down into the water (Acts 8:36–39). Finally, proof is found in the biblical meaning of baptism, analogous to the death

and resurrection of Jesus Christ. One must be totally immersed in water to symbolize being buried with Christ in a watery grave (Rom. 6:3–6; Col 2:12).

Peter drew the analogy between baptism and the flood in which only a few people were saved through water (1 Pet. 3:20): “And I cannot help pointing out what a perfect illustration this is of the way you have been admitted to the Christian ‘ark’ by baptism, which means, of course, far more than the mere washing of a dirty body: it means the ability to face God with a clear conscience” (Phillips). Baptism actually does far more than remove figurative dirt from the body, which means the removing of sin from our spiritual record—it also actively gives one the *ability* to face our Creator with a clear conscience.

The RSV translates this verse slightly different, amplifying the intrinsically rich meaning: “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (v. 21). Baptism in fact does both: it gives the repentant sinner both “the ability to face God” and is “an appeal to God.” But this ability or appeal for a clear conscience can only be through the resurrection of Jesus Christ; “For there is in every true baptism the virtue of Christ rising from the dead” (verse 21, Phillips).

Water baptism is the most important (of the very few) New Testament ceremonies or rituals commanded by Christ and followed by the apostles and early New Testament Church. It is, essentially, the formal initiatory rite to Christianity and is replete with profound spiritual significance and rich personal meaning for every true Christian and prospective member of God’s kingdom. The biblical injunction of water baptism is an outward sign showing an inward attitude of repentance and faith toward Jesus Christ, and is the only way by which an individual can receive God’s Holy Spirit which makes him part of the body of Christ. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body [the Church], whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13).

Baptism pictures and symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:2–6; Col. 2:12–13). Baptism is also symbolic of the repentant believer’s own death, burial, and resur-

rection from a watery grave, as already noted. In Romans 6 Paul explains that just as Christ died for mankind’s sins and was buried, baptism—being plunged into a watery grave, as it were—is symbolic of the death and burial of one’s old sinful life. And as Christ was resurrected in newness of life, when a person comes up out of the waters of baptism, it is symbolic of his rising up out of his past “grave” to live a new life free from the guilt of past sins and secondly, the death penalty those sins incurred (Rom. 6:23).

“How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Rom. 6:2–8).

Paul explains again in slightly different terms the same principle in Colossians 2:12–13: “...and you were buried with Him [Christ] in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith and the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God hath made alive together with Him....” Paul adds in Colossians 3:1 that since we have symbolically risen from the grave with Christ, we should set our orientation of mind on spiritual things instead of carnal, physical things. “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above....”

Of all the symbolic and deep spiritual meaning associated with baptism, there remain four fundamental reasons why a person should be baptized: to follow Christ’s example, to have one’s sins forgiven, to receive the Holy Spirit, and, lastly, to be changed from mortal to immortal. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter clearly stated that one is baptized to have his sins forgiven. He clearly explained Christ was the Messiah and in killing Christ the people had killed their Savior. “Now when they heard this, they were *pricked in their*

heart, and said unto Peter and unto the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter’s response was that they should “Repent and be baptized...for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (verse 38). This clearly proves one is baptized because he wants to have his sins forgiven and covered by the shed blood of Christ.

In addition to his own baptism “with water unto repentance,” John the Baptist made a brief reference to two further uses of the concept of baptism; referring to Jesus Christ, he said, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Mt. 3:11). To be baptized with the Holy Spirit shows a Christian must be “immersed” in it. The baptism of fire refers to the lake of fire which will totally “immerse” and burn up unrepentant sinners at the end of this age. John the Baptist compared those who will not obey God to “chaff” (v. 12) which would be burned up by Jesus Christ instead of being gathered to Himself as will the “wheat”—referring to Christians who obey God (Mt. 3:11–12; 13:24–30; Luke 3:16–17).

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LAYING ON OF HANDS

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The laying on of hands is a ceremony performed by God’s servants on special occasions such as for receiving God’s Holy Spirit after baptism, at ordination, anointing of the sick, and for other special purposes. It symbolizes one’s submission to God and unity with the Church, which is God’s instrument on earth.

Matthew 19:13–15; Acts 6:5–6; 8:17–18; 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14; Hebrews 6:2

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Hebrews 6:2 identifies the laying-on-of-hands ceremony as one of the fundamental doctrines of the Church. It is an old and important religious ceremony with both the Old and New Testaments being replete with examples of its use.

The “laying-on-of-hands” is the act of one person in religious authority putting his hands upon the head of another for a blessing, a special religious office, or for some other conferred spiritual gift. It is usually accompanied by a prayer that delineates the nature of the spiritual blessing and asks God to grant it to the individual.

The significance of this act is to display the individual person is being set apart for a spiritually related reason. It confirms he is being acknowledged as qualified and responsible for a particular task or being given a blessing out of the ordinary. As such the laying on of hands is often a public ceremony performed in front of members of the congregation.

The act of laying on of hands has special symbolic meaning. It shows that God works through fallible human beings when administering church government. When a servant lays his hands upon a person to confer the spiritual blessing or gift, he does so as an agent or representative of God fulfilling a position of spiritual authority within the Church. Likewise, one who submits to this ceremony during ordination, after baptism, during anointing for healing or under any other special circumstances is acknowledging the authority God has placed in the Church and ministry and shows submission to this authority. The servant, of course, is not an agent of God on his own, but only through the Church. He does not administer his own authority but only that of the Church as empowered by God. The servant does not confer anything of his own by the laying on of hands, but instead, symbolizes what God confers.

The earliest examples of using this ceremony are found in the Old Testament. Jacob laid his hands upon the heads of Ephraim and Manasseh to pass along the birthright promises of nationhood God made to his grandfather, Abraham (Gen. 48:13–20). When God chose a physical priesthood, they were set apart for their holy duty by the laying on of hands. Only a tribe specially consecrated by this special ceremony could officiate in God’s temple (Num. 8:9–11, 14–15). Likewise, Joshua had hands

laid upon him, showing God had set him apart to become the new ruler of Israel (Num. 27:18–19).

The New Testament shows through command and example various times when the church should use the laying on of hands. It is most often used for conferring the Holy Spirit upon a person after baptism in accordance with Acts 8:15–17 and other scriptures. At this time the servant places his hands upon the head of the newly baptized individual and prays, asking God to give the new convert His Holy Spirit. It is through this ceremony that a person is set apart as a chosen, begotten son of God.

James 5:14, Mark 16:18, and other scriptures show how God’s servants should lay hands upon and anoint with oil those who come to them requesting God’s divine healing for their sicknesses. Again the act symbolizes that God will set aside the person for special consideration or attention and illustrates unity and interdependency within the Body of Christ.

Another application of the laying on of hands ceremony is during the ordination of elders, deacons, and deaconesses. All these offices are positions of authority, function, and responsibility within the Church. Ordination by the laying on of hands is God’s way of setting apart and conferring upon a human instrument a role of service to God. (This implies the individual has learned how to serve God faithfully—Acts 6:6; 13:3.)

The Church also uses this ceremony traditionally in the blessing of little children in accordance with the example set by Jesus in Matthew 19:13–15. God’s servants on special occasions place their hands upon, and ask God’s blessing for, small children who have never before undergone this blessing ceremony. It symbolizes the child’s sanctification by God for special physical protection and spiritual blessings.

During the marriage ceremony, the officiating minister of the Church of God places his hands upon the joined hands of a couple while they kneel with him in prayer. The symbolism of this act portrays the couple’s call on God to enter their marriage and set them apart as special to Him as well as to each other. They are also making a covenant with God to follow His laws.

The laying on of hands is a simple but deeply symbolic ceremony which has special application in special circumstances as explained above. It is of critical importance to Christianity, because it shows God works and deals with mankind through other human beings whom He chooses and sets apart for His purpose, though they are fallible and imperfect.

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