



SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

PRIMARY DOCTRINES

ORGANIZATION AND PURPOSE

The Church of God International has produced this *Systematic Theology Project* (STP) to reflect its doctrines, beliefs, practices, and traditions.

Within the Church, the systematic theology establishes a coherent and consistent reference for the ministry and lay membership. As such, it promotes unity among the ministry and further understanding among the members. As a formal record of the Church's beliefs and teachings, the systematic theology provides an official source of public information about the doctrines of the Church of God International.

The Bible alone is God's written revelation to man. This systematic theology is simply an attempt to explain *our comprehension* of God's Word as believed, taught, expounded, and applied by the Church. It is written by and for fallible human beings—and is consequently *not to be put* on a par with God's Holy Word. The systematic theology is not to replace, supersede, or overshadow the Bible. The point of view is that of looking up toward, and not down upon, God's Word. Although we are building a superstructure, the Bible will always remain the foundation. The readership of this theology is cautioned not to lose this perspective.

A specific approach is followed in order to make this systematic theology applicable and relevant to ourselves and others. A document intended to fulfill the goals of being accurate, readable, unifying and informative must, of course, be written in a manner that can accomplish these goals. This Systematic Theology Project is therefore somewhat different from other systematic theologies whose goals are different from ours. While other projects may be aimed at scholars or theologians exclusively, this work is intended to be a practical working tool for the field ministry of the Church of God

International. As such, there will be material—for example, on Christian living and Church organization—that is not ordinarily found in academic systematic theologies. Some of these subjects could be classified as administrative practices or Church traditions rather than doctrines and beliefs. The point is that everything included is given as *guidelines* for the ministry. Therefore, we are under no illusion that this systematic theology is like any others. It is unique and *intentionally so*.

While the Worldwide Church of God traces its roots to the New Testament Church, our recent history dates from the calling of Herbert W. Armstrong in the late 1920s and to his commission by God in the early 1930s to preach the gospel to the world as a witness. As the Pastor General of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG), he set the example of approaching doctrine as a search for truth so one might know and obey God. He also recognized that it is ultimately through God's Spirit that we can fully comprehend the Bible. For the years since Mr. Armstrong's calling until now, the written record of our beliefs has taken the form of booklets or articles on individual topics written as we grew in knowledge, understanding, and insight. But as the WCG developed into a substantial institution, Garner Ted Armstrong, Executive Vice-President of the WCG at that time, recognized the need for a more organized, thorough systematic presentation of the WCG's doctrines and beliefs, and thus commissioned the present Project, back in the mid to late 1970s.

During the final months of preparation, Garner Ted Armstrong presented the STP to his father, Herbert W. Armstrong, in the form of a rough draft. On several visits to the elder Armstrong's home in Tucson, Garner Ted Armstrong and other ministers read through various segments of the STP which they knew might be of special interest to the elder Armstrong, particularly the sections on Healing and

Tithing. Some minor edits were made, and Mr. Herbert Armstrong *approved the project*.

He was *fully aware* of the development of the STP through all its phases. Repeated mention of the STP was made in the “Pastor’s Report” to all the field ministry, and repeated solicitations for input from the entire ministry of the WCG were made through that medium.

Later, after the rough draft was typewritten, printed, and placed in a loose-leaf binder with spacers and vinyl cover, Herbert Armstrong told the ministry he had “never seen” the document; said he had not authorized it, and repudiated the entire project. In letters and articles, he charged the document “did away with tithing.” Others influenced Mr. Armstrong to believe such outrageous conclusions—they shall bear their own responsibility. As will be clearly seen, there was no “watering down” of doctrine in the STP, and the document on tithing is particularly strong.

Since the leadership of the Worldwide Church of God repudiated the entire STP, requiring all ministers to turn in their copies, and presumably destroyed them, taking the document out of circulation, it was understood the Worldwide Church of God relinquished all claims to the material.

By unanimous decision of the Board of Trustees of the Church of God International, and by unanimous approval of the original Ministerial Council, the *Systematic Theology Project* was adopted as the official “statement of belief and practice” by the Church of God International at its commencement in 1978.

The Ministerial Council unanimously agreed the STP was the “starting point” for all future doctrinal discussions and papers. It remains in a loose-leaf form. It remains an *incomplete document*, implicit of a “work in progress”—it is an ongoing project. However, in its present form, it represents the most comprehensive statement of doctrines and practices of the Church of God International’s understanding of the Bible’s explanations of God’s truth.

Now, with the initial establishment of the more formalized systematic theology, certain fundamental difficulties arise as byproducts of the process. First is simply the “look” of apparent perfection and permanence. Only the Bible itself claims total inspiration, and any systematic theology must be at least somewhat arbitrary and artificial. The Bible is God’s Word, presenting with great literary scope

and historical sweep the record of God’s instructions to man and man’s relationship with God. As such, the reality of biblical truth is coherent and integrated. Biblical “doctrines” are not formally categorized into topics, subtopics, and sub-subtopics. But this is what must be done in any systematic theology. We have obviously tried to formulate the overall organization to best represent the current teachings of the Church of God International. Yet, since this doctrinal organization, as with any doctrinal organization, must divide the truth of God into independent subjects, the full impact of the tight interrelationships and interdependencies among all doctrines must of necessity be somewhat sacrificed. Furthermore, we fully recognize the numerous ways in which this systematic theology could have been organized. We have no illusion what is hereby presented is perfect or cannot be improved upon, but we intend to accurately reflect the *contemporary teachings* of the Church.

The Church recognizes “doctrine” as simply being the basic teaching tenets of the Bible and the Church. The importance of understanding true doctrine is as vital as understanding God’s master plan itself—since doctrine in reality is only this same master plan broken down into its component parts. The challenge of any systematic theology is to take these various parts and organize them in a clear and logical fashion.

The paradox of any systematic theology (as discussed in the section on the Bible) is that no one doctrine can be understood apart from all the other doctrines, and it is impossible to comprehend all the doctrines without understanding each individual one. The interrelationships and interdependencies among all the biblical teachings are extremely strong. The structural associations and interactions among the numerous doctrines are therefore not limited to a simple two-dimensional linear progression. Rather, what we are confronted with is a multidimensional structure with the number of dimensions just about equaling the number of doctrines. This means to explain fully almost any of the biblical doctrines, one would have to explain most of the others.

How then do we start? How can we best begin to systematize biblical theology? Our approach has been first to discern the appropriate subjects necessary to most efficiently include the full body of the Church’s biblical teachings, and then proceed to

organize them into a logical and consistent structure. We developed seven general categories and over thirty major doctrinal topics for this *preliminary draft*. Categories and topics were chosen and organized to best reflect a logical pattern of biblical order and to emphasize them as taught and practiced by the Church of God International.

1. **Primary Doctrines:** God, The Father, Bible, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, Mankind and the Spirit in Man, Angelic Realm;

2. **Salvation:** Salvation, Faith, Repentance, Baptisms, Laying on of Hands;

3. **Kingdom of God:** Kingdom of God, Gospel, Prophecy, Resurrections, Judgment;

4. **Law of God:** Law of God, Biblical Covenants, Ten Commandments, Sabbath, Annual Holy Days, Tithing and Giving, Sin, Biblical Dietary Laws, Marriage;

5. **The Christian:** The Christian, The Christian Relationship with God, The Christian Relationship with Fellow Man, The Christian Family, Healing;

6. **The Church of God:** The Church of God, Ministry of the Church, Fellowship of the Brethren;

7. **Traditional Christian Doctrines:** Statements on almost thirty traditional doctrines, such as immortal soul, heaven, hell, trinity, Sunday, Christmas, Easter, rapture, etc., presenting the theological viewpoint of the Church of God International.

Next, each doctrinal subject was thoroughly explored from both biblical and Church perspectives to determine the scope of subtopics and concepts to be covered. These were then submitted to dozens of ministers for evaluation. The actual writing of the papers was developed from a carefully constructed outline of concept flow and then directed to emphasize a practical product. Each paper was written to be readable and useful as well as biblically accurate and logical. The papers were submitted to other ministers and scholars of the Worldwide Church of God for critique, and each paper passed through many edits. As an explanation *rather than*

as a defense, each doctrinal paper expresses our beliefs honestly (and hopefully clearly) in a straightforward manner. This systematic theology is thereby *not intended* as a challenge or rebuttal to others' beliefs.

Each particular doctrinal paper contains first a "Doctrinal Statement" (a succinct and direct declaration of the essence of what we believe on the topic), followed by a "Doctrinal Overview" (an expanded statement summarizing the basic tenets of the doctrine), and finally, in papers on doctrines requiring a more comprehensive explanation, a "Doctrinal Exposition" (a full, detailed explanation of the subject).

One objective this project strives to achieve is to project the right perspective by presenting each doctrine in its proper biblical context and appropriate relationship to other doctrines. We try to emphasize what is of clear biblical importance. It is all too easy to focus on a relatively minor point of doctrine to the apparent exclusion of more fundamental topics. This usually happens because one has questions he feels need immediate resolution; at other times it is because one has a particular interest in the topic. Sometimes points of doctrine generate focus or interest inversely proportioned to how much the Bible discusses them; this is quite understandable, because the obscure points are, by their very nature, more intellectually stimulating and intriguing than the obvious and easily proved fundamentals of the faith. However, no matter what the reasons, the pitfall of doctrinal myopia is to lose the vision of the "big picture" of God's master plan. Once one has lost this overview, he has lost his spiritual way.

The best way to keep our doctrinal focus sharp and clear is to stay focused on the central figure of the entire Bible: Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is both the focal point and "big picture" of the entire Bible—He is the overview of both testaments. The Old Testament is the story of His creation and government (Col. 1:16), His dealings with Israel (I Cor. 10:4), and His laws; it also records His ancestry and the detailed prophecies of His first and second comings. The New Testament is the story of His life, sacrifice as the Messiah, and message, the magnification of His laws, the beginning of His Church and the announcement of His coming Kingdom. If Christ did not exist, there would be no Bible—there would be no point to it. Jesus Christ is the Word of God; and since the Bible is God's written word, it

is, in a very real sense, the embodiment of Jesus Christ in verbal representation on the printed page.

In accordance with this central figure and overview of the Bible, this systematic theology stresses Jesus Christ—past, present, and future. It tells of His life, His works, His message, His “good news,” His teachings, His instructions, His laws, His way of life, His admonitions, His corrections, His rebukes, His love, His mercy, His forgiveness, His people, His friends, His covenant, His Church, His Kingdom, His promises, and His salvation to us by His sacrifice as our Messiah; and formal introduction to His Father. The focus is on Jesus Christ, as these statements represent His and the Father’s doctrines, which we have attempted to present in an organized and systematic manner. No one keeping close to the trunk of this tree will easily get caught out on a limb. No one following the foundational doctrines of Jesus Christ will easily suffer doctrinal “tunnel vision” and the resultant spiritual blindness that such tunnel vision can cause.

God’s purpose for mankind offers the most incredible human potential that can be imagined. Indeed, it stretches the imagination beyond its limit, for God states that every human being can eventually be born into God’s own family, with God Himself as his or her real Father (Rom 8:15; John 20:17). Man was designed to become a full immortal member of God’s eternal family, just as our elder brother Jesus Christ is a part of that immortal family. This is mankind’s ineffably awesome potential—a spectacular destiny that will eventually include “all things” as part of our inheritance (Romans 8:16–18; Hebrews 2:5–8).

God’s plan for accomplishing this purpose for mankind is equally breathtaking. God will make His truth known to all human beings from all time and every place and give to each of them individually a full opportunity for salvation (John 3:17; 1 Tim. 2:4). God is not willing that any should perish and has structured a plan that will make available to all people the full knowledge of His purpose and way (though what they do with this knowledge will be a product of their independent minds and will, to which God has given free moral agency).

This, then, is a foundational biblical doctrine as believed and taught by the Church of God International—that all mankind, every human being who has ever lived, will eventually have the opportunity to become born of God into the immortal

family of God. Around this fundamental concept every other biblical doctrine must revolve and relate because, ultimately, God is *unquestionably fair* to all human beings (Rev. 20:5, 11–13).

Owing to the obvious interdependence of biblical doctrines, not everything said on any particular subject can often be presented in the same place or even in the same paper. The reader is requested to keep this in mind *before making* hasty evaluations or jumping to quick conclusions. For example, the complex discussion of “law and grace” must be woven through many of the doctrinal statements. This has been an especially confusing subject for those who have erroneously claimed the Church of God International teaches salvation can be earned through obedience to the law. In order for the reader to grasp the full and proper biblical understanding of the many-faceted interrelationships between law and grace, *several* of the following doctrinal statements, overviews, and expositions need to be read in parallel (beginning with the statements on the Law of God and Salvation, including the Biblical Covenants, Sabbath, Ten Commandments, and “Law or Grace” in the statement on Traditional Christian Doctrines. Finally, relevant aspects of other papers should be included, such as the historical comparison between the Church of God International and the early New Testament Church as found in the statement on the Church of God).

All doctrinal statements need to be read in their entirety. By searching through the systematic theology in general or any one statement in particular for the answer to an intriguing or nettlesome problem, one runs the risk of short-circuiting himself. To accurately comprehend the specific subject of one’s current interest, the reader is advised to at least read through that whole doctrinal statement to appreciate the full scope of the doctrine under consideration, as well as skim through any related statements. (For example, many of the more general—but most powerful—reasons how we can know the early New Testament Church observed God’s Feast days are not presented in the statement on Annual Holy Days, but are in the sections of the Law of God, Biblical Covenants, and especially the Sabbath.)

The systematic theology project is the product of numerous ministers and scholars of the Church. While this systematic theology is a substantial resource of knowledge and experience, it must not

be cemented in stone. *It will need continual revision as God guides the Church in further understanding of His word.*

Therefore, what is presented here is still in preliminary form. It must *continue to grow* in both scope and quality—it's a process. But it cannot grow without constructive input. Ministers should consider it their responsibility to help refine the Systematic Theology Project, contributing to it in the same spirit with which it was prepared, and should encourage interested members to contribute to the project. Hence, we accept, appreciate, and welcome—indeed *solicit*—all information, which serves to enhance and improve this effort.

Please note that below is the format recommended by the CGI Ministerial Council for doctrinal papers. This format can be simplified for proposing changes to the *Systematic Theology Project*.

PROCEDURE FOR PRESENTING STUDY PAPERS

The increasing number of Bible study papers, articles, and doctrinal treatises being submitted to the ministry has made us aware of a need for a more consistent format or presentation.

It is surprising how difficult it can be to determine exactly what a person is trying to say. Oftentimes the main idea is buried somewhere in the middle of the paper, or it may be obscurely worded. Even when reading papers presented by experienced writers, it could be very useful to know exactly where to look in the paper for a simple statement of the thesis, the consequences of the concept if proved, the underlying assumptions, and the most important points.

It is for this reason we request all future doctrinal and Bible study papers be submitted in a standard format. The sample format below illustrates the format we prefer.

In addition, we have a couple of other suggestions to offer. Unless you are linguistically qualified, we suggest you avoid arguments based on linguistic evidence. If you cannot find a reputable translation to support your argument, it is probably unsupported and may not be given credence by knowledgeable persons. Also, remember the failure to disprove a thesis *does not* constitute proof of the thesis.

Please feel free to share your research with us. We

always like to hear from you, and let us encourage you that using this format will increase the possibilities for your work to be understood correctly.

SAMPLE FORMAT

TITLE:
SUBJECT:
AUTHOR:

THESIS: One paragraph stating your position or proposition.

CONSEQUENCES: A statement of importance of the thesis and its impact on existing beliefs, doctrines, or practices of the church.

ASSUMPTIONS: Sequentially numbered statements of relevant concepts you believe are agreed upon by all concerned.

SUPPORT: Sequentially numbered points of proof, evidence, or argument offered in *descending* order of importance—the strongest and most central point first.

SUMMARY: One page summary of the foregoing.

NOTES: Any further explanation you wish to offer including a discussion of anticipated objections to your presentation.

Continued next page

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT (STP) REVISIONS

1978: Original Worldwide Church of God version of the STP released.

1986: First Church of God International printing with minor revisions, including changing most references of Worldwide Church of God to Church of God International.

2012: CGI Ministerial Council approved revision to remove two “interracial marriage” paragraphs in *The Christian Relationship with Fellowman*.

2015: CGI Ministerial Council directive to revise and align the *CGI Statement of Beliefs* and the *CGI Systematic Theology Project* to reflect current teaching.

VERBAL PRESENTATION TO THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

If the Council wishes to hear a verbal presentation of your paper, we will follow these basic rules:

- You will present your paper without interruption.
- A time limit for this presentation will be agreed upon.
- The Council members will then present their questions for you to answer or expand upon.
- There will be a formal response to the paper.

GOD

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

God is the eternal, omnipresent, all-powerful, supreme Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe. God is *one*, composed of spirit and comprising a family revealed presently as consisting of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. God is a loving, kind, merciful being who wants to share His magnificent existence by reproducing Himself through man.

Psalm 19:1; 50:1, 6–7; Isaiah 44:6; Nehemiah 9:6 16–17; John 1:12–13; 3:16; Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:1–2; 1 John 3:1–2; Jeremiah 9:23–24

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The most fundamental need facing mankind is to recognize God's existence and to understand His character, personality and master plan. Man will continue to flounder without real knowledge of the purpose of life until he gains an accurate and clear picture of his Creator (Matt. 23:37; Acts 17:23; Jer. 24:7; 31:34).

The question of whether God's existence can be proved has troubled mankind throughout millennia, stirring heated debate with arguments on both sides. Unfortunately, the form most of these debates take is one person tries to forcibly "prove" God's existence to another, attempting to formulate arguments or logic so airtight as to exclude any other possibil-

ity. This approach does not work. No argument, no matter how carefully thought out or logically constructed, can absolutely "prove" God's existence to one who will grasp at virtually *any other* unlikely explanation or remote possibility. No person can make another person believe in God!

Nevertheless, God's existence can be totally proved. Anyone who has individually and personally experienced the biblical miracle of conversion, or has received miraculous answers to their prayers, has truly and irrefutably proved God's existence to themselves and cannot be shaken from this proof by any argument, whether theological or philosophical, as long as they stay in this contact with God (John 20:29; Mark 9:24).

Also, God's existence is powerfully demonstrated by the creation. The reality of the material universe, the existence of life, and the interdependence and sustenance of the laws governing the physical dimension respectively require a Creator, a Life-Giver and Sustainer. Thus David said: "The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). Likewise, Paul records that "the invisible things of Him [God] from [looking up at] the creation ... are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).

The Bible reveals that the one God is a family composed of two members—the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ. John's Gospel states these two have dwelt together from eternity and they share power, glory, and majesty, although Christ is second in authority (John 14:28; 1 Cor. 15:24–28). Additionally, the Bible explains the Holy Spirit to be equated with God (Acts 5:3–4; 2 Cor. 3:17), and illustrates the Holy Spirit is the essence, power, mind, and spiritual extension and presence of God, rather than a third personal being. (Please see our STP statement on the Holy Spirit). From the biblical revelation we infer that God resembles man in certain aspects but is composed of spirit instead of flesh (Jn. 4:24), radiating spiritual energy and power. The few references to God's "appearance" emphasize His incredible brilliance (Rev. 1:14–16; Dan. 7:9–10).

The Father and Son, though two distinct persons are "one" in much the same way Adam and Eve were "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Throughout Scripture, the one God is described as a single per-

son, indicated by the frequent occurrence of singular pronouns such as “I,” “Me,” “He,” “Him,” and “His,” all of which refer to the one true God. But we see similar usage in descriptions of humankind. In Genesis 6, for instance, humankind is described as a single person. God will not “strive with man forever, for *he* is indeed flesh,” and “*his* days shall be” limited, for “the intent of the thoughts of *his* heart was only evil continually” (vv. 3, 5). Clearly, the one “man” is not a single human person, though singular pronouns are used in descriptions of man.

Similarly, the one God is not a single divine person, though singular pronouns are used to describe God.

God is not two Spirits, but one Spirit (that’s the essence of God). Within that *one* Spirit, or essence, are the Father and the Son, and the two *are distinct* persons in the family of God. The *one* Spirit is called the “Spirit of Christ” because Christ sends it. It is also called the “Spirit of the Father” (or “Spirit of Him Who raised Jesus from the dead”) because the Father sends it, too (Jn. 14–16). Also, it is the means whereby these two persons, Father and Son, dwell “in” or “with” Christ’s disciples. (“I will send the Helper ... My Father will send the Helper ... We will come unto you ... make our abode with you...,” etc). It is the one essence of God, both Father and Son, not two essences (which would be Semi-Arianism).

God is the total embodiment of love; He is the originator of law and the giver of every good and perfect gift. His many titles and names (Creator, Counselor, Healer, Self-Existent One, Father, Almighty, etc.) reveal His special qualities of character and personality. Yet it is God’s mercy and compassion that are paramount in giving full hope and confidence to fallible human beings who are all sinners.

Perhaps the most outstanding single characteristic of God is His total and complete unselfish *love*. This one quality is so much a part of God’s entire makeup that He is in actuality its ultimate quintessential personification and hence “*is love*” (1 Jn. 4:8). God has demonstrated His love for us in many ways: through the sacrifice of His Son (Jn. 3:16), by forgiving our sins, by strengthening our will and determination in the face of trials; and in a variety of countless other ways. But perhaps the single greatest expression of God’s love is that He devised a plan to share Himself, by *reproducing Himself*

through man (Rom. 8:15; Jn. 20:17; Heb. 2).

This master plan is indeed the most remarkable truth and, incredibly, the very reason why the entire universe was created (Heb. 2:7–8). All human beings from all times, since Adam and Eve, shall have a fair and full opportunity to become members of God’s family. Mankind has been created in God’s image (Gen. 1:26) and put on earth to reject evil and thereby build character so each human being can spiritually be born into God’s kingdom and family (1 Cor. 15; Rom. 5:1–5; Phil. 2:12–16; 2 Pet. 1:5–7; Rev. 2:7, 10–11, 17, 26–27; 3:5, 12, 21). Thus God’s family of two revealed persons shall grow to an innumerable multitude, and God’s greatness shall be multiplied by many times as an incredible number of sons and daughters are added to His family (Rev. 7).

The God of the Bible is both cosmic and personal. He is the Creator of the universe and at the same time is concerned for each human being. He sustains galaxies and controls the full scope of human history, while at the same time He focuses intense concern on each man, woman, and child who seeks Him. God is involved with the whole of mankind: in the rise and fall of governments, in the sweep of generations, in the ultimate direction of human society. Yet, this same being is intimately involved in the personal lives of human beings from every social stratum, race, and intellect. God is merciful to sinners; He is compassionate and deeply desires that we attain the greatest possible happiness and success (Joel 2:13; Jn. 3:16).

For now, God rules the spiritual and material universe from His throne in heaven, although His mind and Spirit reach everywhere (Ps. 139:7–10; 1 Kings 8:27). Beside Him sits His Son, Jesus Christ, and the two of them, surrounded and aided by myriads of angels of differing ranks and authority, direct the working out of their master plan (Rev. 5). Eventually, God’s throne will be moved to the “new earth” of Revelation 21 from where He and His innumerable multitude of sons will rule His Kingdom and the unfathomable vastness of the infinite universe for all eternity.

To Know More...

Please visit www.CGI.org. The **Topics Menu** features booklets, articles, and sermons for most of the subjects of the *Systematic Theology Project*, including the subject of “God.”

THE FATHER

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Scripture reveals that God is a family, currently consisting of Father and Son. The Father is revealed to mankind as the perfect, Holy, Supreme Sovereign who inhabits eternity. Most references to “God” in the New Testament are references to Him. Jesus introduces and declares the Father to be greater than the Son and teaches us to pray to the Father, knowing the Father hears and answers our prayers.

Daniel 7:13–14; Matthew 6:9; John 1:1–2, 18; 6:44–65; 14:28; 1 Corinthians 15:24–28; 1 John 4:8

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

God the Father and the Word have eternally existed as one. As mentioned in the **Statement on God**, God is not two Spirits, but one Spirit (“Spirit” is the *essence* of God). Within that **one** Spirit—the one eternal essence—are the Father and the Son, but, the two are *distinct* Persons in the family of God.

John reveals God (the Father and the Word) existed together before the creation of the universe (John 1:1–2). Jesus explained how He shared glory with the Father *before* the world was (17:5), and it is shown in Titus 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:9 that this included a plan for mankind that included eternal life, promised *before* the world was.

We understand that the oneness of God in the Old Testament includes the perfect agreement between the Father and Son in their planning for mankind and the awesome splendor of the Creation. Jesus further shows this perfect agreement when He explains that He came forth from God (John 16:27) and that His words are *from* the Father (John 14:10). When Scripture refers to “God,” we understand from the context whether it is referring to God the Father or to Jesus Christ the Son or to the family of God, as Paul clarifies in Ephesians 3:14–16: “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” From the New

Testament we learn much about Jesus (from what is written), yet, primarily from Jesus, we also have more personal characteristics *revealed* about the Father (Matt. 11:27).

The Bible begins by showing one of God’s works is: being the Creator.

Genesis 1:1 states, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” John 1 informs us that the Word (the preincarnate Jesus) did the actual “work” of creating everything per the plan of God.

Daniel received a vision of God revealing the Father as the Ancient of Days and Jesus as the Son of Man (a title Jesus uses often in all four Gospels).

“I was watching in the night visions,
And behold, *One* like the Son of Man,
Coming with the clouds of heaven!
He came to the Ancient of Days,
And they brought Him near before Him.
Then to Him was given dominion and glory
and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve Him.
His dominion *is* an everlasting dominion,
Which shall not pass away,
And His kingdom *the one*
Which shall not be destroyed” (Dan.
7:13–14).

It is interesting to see how the Father is supreme, yet generously granting dominion and glory and a kingdom to the Son. There is no jealousy or holding back in what the Father grants! Yet Paul clarifies, because the Father is supreme, we know the Father is the exception from “all things” being “under Christ.”

“Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For ‘HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS UNDER HIS FEET.’ But when He says ‘all things are put under Him,’ it is evident that **He who put all things under Him is excepted**. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:24–28).

We understand the love the Father has for Jesus (His only begotten Son) as shown at Jesus baptism. “And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying,

‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’” (Matt. 3:17). We also understand the sacrifice of the Father, when He allowed Jesus to be crucified, as in the Old Testament when Abraham, who symbolized God the Father, was asked to sacrifice the promised son, Isaac. Every parent understands the desire parents have to love and protect their children—to be the hero in their lives. Jesus knew of this special bond, yet was willing to complete His sacrifice as it was needed to fulfil God’s plan for mankind and humanity’s NEED of a Saviour.

“Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matt. 26:53).

We know from 2 Kings 19:35 that “one angel” killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night. With about 6,000 soldiers in a Roman Legion, Jesus was saying His Father was ready to intervene with 72,000 angels to stop His arrest if He asked! This sacrifice from Jesus and from the Father is the basis of perhaps the best-known verse in the Bible:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16–17).

The Father possesses all of the attributes of God and is honoured by the many titles of God that further show our praises to Him. Today, the Father in heaven is rewarding those who pray to Him (Matt. 6), providing sun and rain for the just and the unjust (Matt. 5), and fulfilling the needs of the birds and of mankind (Matt. 6). Further, the Father is drawing people to Jesus through His Spirit (John 6:44, 65), and the Father alone knows the day and hour when He will send Jesus back to our planet at the end of this age (Matt. 24:36).

The book of Revelation speaks of a time beyond the millennial reign of Christ:

“Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people” (Rev. 21:2–3). **God Himself** will be with them *and be* their God.

God the Father and our elder brother, Jesus Christ, offer this wonderful future to humankind.

But as it is written:

“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9).

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BIBLE

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The whole Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God containing His plan of salvation, and record of His participation throughout history. The Bible is God’s revelation of knowledge that man cannot discover for himself. It is the foundation of knowledge, and the guidebook of life. The Old and New Testaments comprise God’s written Word, which forms the basis of Christianity as taught by the church and practiced by the Christian.

Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4; John 17:17; Romans 8:16; 1 Corinthians 2:7–11; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:20; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 3:15–16

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Bible is God’s written revelation to mankind. It contains God’s instructions to man and the record of God’s interaction with mankind. The Bible provides the answers to mankind’s fundamental questions of life. It is the revelation of an omniscient, omnipotent, and loving God; it reveals who God is, and what His plan and purpose for human beings is.

The Bible exists to provide man with essential knowledge, which he could not learn apart from divine revelation. Thus, the Bible includes fundamental principles of how man should live, how he should govern his personal life to generate success and happiness, and how to amicably work with his fellow man to achieve peace and harmony. But at its

foundational core, the Bible provides the indispensable knowledge of how man may gain salvation and eternal life—knowledge which he is incapable of discovering for himself (1 Cor. 2:7–11). As the repository of this vital information, the Bible is God’s basic handbook for mankind.

The Church of God believes the Bible to be divinely inspired (2 Tim. 3:16), the revelation of the missing dimension in man’s knowledge by the Supreme Authority of the universe. The Church regards the Holy Bible as the receptacle of God’s essential theological knowledge, basic, accurate, and complete in its original form. Of course, there are no original manuscripts extant today. Few are from close to the time of authorship, and even age does not always assure accuracy and fidelity. Therefore, whatever shortcomings may be present in the contemporary biblical manuscripts—because human instruments were writers and copyists, because some translators lacked knowledge of the original languages, or because of the complexities and vagaries implicit in the transmission of various texts—all together have not substantially concealed the intent nor overshadowed the direct inspiration of the basic biblical message we have today.

What part did God allow human fallibility to play in the transmission of the many original biblical texts? This is an interesting question when considering the fact, for example, that there are three Hebrew versions for parts of the Old Testament, all of which are pre-Christian in origin and which writers of the New Testament used and quoted, as recent research proves. Further, analysis of many ancient New Testament texts with their numerous textual variations have *not yielded* obvious or conclusive results for many scriptures, though the most meticulous and highly sophisticated techniques have been employed.

Will new discoveries, investigation, and scholarship generate new questions or uncertainties about specific passages? It doesn’t matter, because the Bible’s primary objectives have never been, and can never be, perverted or corrupted. The sum total of all textual variations *do not alter* the essential communicative function of the Bible. Its fundamental intent is *fully maintained*: all the basic doctrines of God’s Church, to a greater or lesser degree, are discernible from any textual version or translation of the Bible.

The Church accepts the books of the Old

Testament as found in the canon of the Hebrew Bible and the books of the New Testament as found in the canon of the Greek New Testament. These have been sometimes called the “Protestant canon.” This same content has been accepted for much of Christianity for 1,500 years. (The apocryphal books are rejected as non-canonical—useful for history but not doctrine.) The Church has accepted this canon largely on the basis of internal biblical evidence (such as Luke 24:44, etc.), informed faith and tradition. (Jesus’ reference to “the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms” [or writings] gives credence to the order of the Old Testament ending with 2 Chronicles [as in the “Jewish Bible”] instead of Malachi [as in the “Christian Bible”].) The Church believes the Bible canon is complete, and current efforts to bring forward other epistles or gospels, which are possibly useful for history but not for doctrine (many of these are known forgeries with false teachings), can never change the canon.

Essential to the teaching of the Church is the fact that the Bible *can be proved* to be the written Word of God. The foremost proof that God’s Word is precisely what it claims to be is it works in one’s life. The biblical results in ones life for obedience is the Bible’s best stamp of divine authorship. Adherence to its principles, laws, and concepts bring about success and happiness in one’s own life, which is ultimately the most critical *ratification* of its divine inspiration. Only those who sincerely seek to apply the biblical way into their own lives will eventually learn the practical instructions, timeless wisdom, spiritual depth, and living laws come from a Supreme Being, and not merely from fallible, mortal men. Once a person accepts the concept that the Bible contains the inspired Word of God, he is able, by appreciating the intricate yet harmonious interaction of all parts of the Bible, to conclude in faith that the whole Bible, all Scripture, is precisely what it claims to be—“inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). The Christian will also conclude that those parts of the Bible which are by their very nature unable to be “proven” in a mathematical or scientific sense (e.g., as yet unfulfilled prophecies or historical points which are unable to be substantiated by secular references) are indeed part of the Bible and *are accurate* in their proper context (John 10:35—Scripture cannot be broken). In this logical “jump”—this leap

across undocumented gaps—one cannot discount the *importance* of faith.

The Church, of course, acknowledges that the Bible does not claim to be a textbook of comprehensive world history, science and technology, medicine, or any other non-theological discipline. Nonetheless, the Bible is the Word of God, and as such, is the *foundation* of all knowledge, and the storehouse of information essential to salvation.

Fulfilled prophecy is likewise an important aspect of God's Holy Word. God can predict and bring to pass events of the future (Is. 41:21–24). The Creator God could predict the name and actions of Cyrus long before his birth (Is. 44–45). He could tell the intricate and accurate events outlined in Daniel 11 and foretell in detail about the coming of His Son as Savior of the world (Is. 9:53, and many other scriptures). While faith plays a role in assessing the significance of fulfilled prophecy in proving the Bible, there shouldn't be any *doubt* regarding *unfulfilled* prophecy. When the complex sequence of events culminating in the triumphant return of Jesus Christ occurs, there will be no question that God, who foretold it all in biblical prophecy, is the same being who inspired the entirety of the Bible.

The Bible exclusively claims absolute preeminence over all other books esteemed by mankind and challenges humanity by its claim of purity (Ps. 12:6; Prov. 30:5), scope, and completeness (Rev. 22:18–19). The *challenges* of God from the Bible (Is. 41:21–23) are powerful and direct. Its prophecies for the future return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His world-ruling Kingdom of God are clearly straightforward and unmistakable.

In addition to being the written record of the essential theological knowledge for mankind, the Bible is also great literature, with many literary forms and devices—poetry, prose, allegory, epic, parable, history, even humor. It is often open and frank, and yet at other times discreet and obscure. The Bible exposes the weaknesses of its heroes, but calls them the friends of God. It shows the glory and power of the Creator through His many miracles, but it also shows Him intimately concerned with the smallest details of human life. It holds out answers to the riddles of life, yet hides enough of God's nature and the universe to tantalize us and draw us further along in a profound and most remarkable growth process (Eccl. 3:11; Job 38:31; Is. 45:15; Is. 64:8; 1 Cor. 13:12).

We see through the pages of the Bible lessons of human experience. We read of men and women like us, those who share problems common to all—with the *same* pulls and passions, hopes and dreams, fears and frustrations. The Bible not only shows the common heritage of human nature, but enables us to understand the process whereby we *may overcome* the destructive elements within us and *attain* our God-given potential (Ps. 51; 119:11; Rom. 7; 12:2).

The Bible is many books yet one, a superlative example of *e pluribus unum* (“one composed of many”). This incredible unity of design is one of the unique characteristics of the Bible. Another is its internal consistency, in its diversity, combining to form a coherent composite. The mark of one author, for those who have eyes to see, is startlingly apparent.

The authors of the various biblical books came from differing backgrounds, lived in disparate environments, and were diverse in their personalities, education, and professions. They wrote in different styles, from different standpoints, to different audiences, at different times, and from different cultures. Yet the continuing themes God inspired are the same. God used all their various and contrasting perspectives to shape and emphasize the same basic truth. From Genesis to Revelation we read of the same God, the same massive plan being unfolded and developed, with each book augmenting, supporting, and complementing that which has gone before. This unitary focus is due to the God who initiated, organized, and inspired the entire Holy Scriptures. Although many different men played their part as they were moved by His Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20), the Bible remains God's Word and not man's.

This is the only factor, which could explain the uniqueness and stunning coherence of the Bible. Dozens of writers spanning a period of over 1,500 years, from Moses to John, of such dissimilar traits and characteristics, could never have achieved such unity by human efforts alone. Yet the unity is there, not as the product of numerous human minds, but of one mind—the mind of God—interacting with, and directing, the grand sweep of biblical authors in many unlikely forms, but always in such a way that their own personal emotions, feelings, personality, and individual writing styles were employed. *God inspired the message*, but it was conveyed through language and vocabulary that was peculiar and nat-

ural to each man. Consequently, the Bible is a human vehicle through which God chose to convey His revelation to mankind.

The Bible and the physical universe were designed in similar fashion: they both work as products of enormous complex interactions resulting in a wondrously purposeful product. The similarity between the Bible and the universe obviously is to be expected since the same Creator designed them both. The Bible is not a simplistic, deterministic catechism of childish declarative statements. Rather, it is a living record of complex synergetic actions and reactions, stimuli and responses, mistakes and miracles, successes and failures.

There is a paradox in true biblical understanding. In order to properly understand any specific biblical doctrine, it is first necessary to comprehend the entirety of all biblical doctrines; and, clearly, it is impossible to comprehend the entirety of all biblical doctrines until one understands all the specific biblical doctrines separately. Seldom can one biblical teaching be fully understood in isolation. There is an essential interdependence between nearly all biblical doctrines. Each must be understood in light of all the others; there is an enormous amount of interdependence. The reason for this is the inherent unity of the biblical focus and the coherent thread of its message. Visualizing and comprehending the overall scope of the Bible's message must be achieved for proper biblical understanding.

In the Bible, all teachings on any individual subject—for example, honesty, marital fidelity, salvation, the Sabbath, the Millennium—are not limited to just one location; these topics can be found in multiple areas of the Bible. The Bible discusses many subjects within the same chapters and even within the same verses, while at the same time each subject may be discussed throughout numerous books and dozens of verses. So as mentioned, this is the paradox: How can we comprehend the Bible if it requires us to understand *all* the doctrines before one doctrine can be understood? The only solution to the paradox is through the leading of God's Holy Spirit and by diligent, dedicated Bible study. The Bible is indeed the full expression of God's mind and purpose for humanity, and understanding it correctly requires the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:13–14; 1 Jn. 2:26–27).

One of the ways to begin to comprehend the uni-

formity of the Bible is to follow its primary themes all the way through. Of all these, surely the most consistent, decisive, and relevant is *Jesus Christ*. In essence, *He is the focal point of the entire Bible*. He is the personality around whom everything revolves. Jesus Christ was the Creator of all things (Col. 1:16); the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the Rock of Israel as Messiah (Is. 9:53) and Lawgiver (Is. 33:22). He is exemplified throughout the New Testament as Savior and King. He is the Redeemer of all mankind, the supreme Lawgiver and consummate Teacher. He was the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18) and is the Captain of our salvation, our constant intercessor and merciful High Priest (Heb. 2:10, 17). Jesus Christ now is the active head of God's Church and prophesied throughout the entire Bible to return to earth as King of kings and Lord of lords to set up the Kingdom of God for all eternity.

Perhaps one of the most basic statements of how God has revealed Himself to man is found in Hebrews 1:1–2: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son."

This passage evinces several important things about God's communication to man. First, God's message comes in many various forms. Second, it also reveals it was mediated by human beings. This means the divine Word comes to us by human agency. Even Jesus Christ, the divine Son, was in the flesh when He presented many of His teachings; furthermore, those teachings were *not* written down by Him but by His disciples, which some became apostles afterward.

Additionally, there are other important points to understand for proper biblical understanding. For instance, a third point is that no human agent is fully adequate to convey the fullness of God's message. Human language is inadequate to express what can be discerned in its complete spiritual sense only by means of the Holy Spirit. Also, there is the problem of text transmission; this is done by human beings and subject to human error. The problem of understanding ancient languages, which have changed structure and meaning through the ages, or have ceased to be used as a form of communication, adds a further the difficulty.

Fourth, the message of the Bible must speak to all people in every age. Yet society changes, culture modifies, and each Christian finds himself living in a particular evolving situation, which does not

exactly fit that of the original writers of the Bible. Christians do not live in the Old Testament theocracy of ancient Israel with autonomous control of a particular territory. Nor do they live in the New Testament world of Greco-Roman culture. Rather, Christians have lived in radically different environments down through the centuries, from Cologne in the Middle Ages to London in the 17th century to Los Angeles in the nuclear age. Therefore, there is always a certain “communication or generation gap” between the written word and the later reader.

The fifth item: God has deliberately hidden much of His important truth from mankind so the full progression, and eventual resolution, of human history would proceed according to God’s timetable. As a result it is *not man’s fault* he *doesn’t* understand the Bible. Even the prophets of old didn’t always grasp the meaning of their own biblical statements (e.g. Dan. 12:8); and assuredly, they didn’t comprehend the fullness of the mystery of mankind’s destiny (Matt. 13:17; Eph. 3:4–5; Heb. 2:7–8). Jesus Himself spoke in parables so the common people would *not* understand what He was saying (Matt. 13:10–11); He taught His disciples, *not* the masses (v. 10–17), since God’s plan did not yet invite the vast majority of people to be called and converted (e.g. Isa. 49:8; Ezek. 37:13; Matt 7:14; 2 Cor. 6:2).

Once these five points are recognized, a specific progression of biblical logic must be followed and accepted unless one is to falsely assume God has left man in the dark about His basic purpose and plan of salvation. This progression can be summarized as follows:

1. The essential truths God wishes to convey will be intelligible to any normal person, regardless of his education or intelligence (*if* God has chosen to open his mind). These truths can be discerned from any basic version or translation of the Bible, which the reader understands. This must be true regardless of textual revision and/or a poor translation.

2. God must open a person’s mind in order for him or her to understand the fullness of His truth. It is, of course, possible for human beings to learn many aspects of the Bible on their own, utilizing the mechanisms of intellect and the tools of scholarship. Yet God has so designed the Bible and the human mind that even with the most intense effort men cannot fully grasp the profound spiritual depth

of the Scriptures without the *active involvement* of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:7–11). The mind of man cannot understand the things of God—the mysteries of God—without the supernatural help from the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:12–16). Since human language is always inadequate to break through the boundaries of spiritual reality and truth, a perceptive spiritual understanding of the Bible requires the *direct intervention and action* of the Holy Spirit “bearing witness with our spirit” (Rom. 8:16), thereby *effecting a change* in the mind of the individual. Only God can make this decision to open our minds through His Spirit. It makes no difference how vehemently a human being desires to understand the Bible, or how hard he studies, though such study will produce much knowledge, this knowledge will remain physically oriented and bound—forever missing the vital key of spiritual enlightenment. Paul wrote, “So it depends not upon man’s will or exertion, but upon God’s mercy” (Rom. 9:16); so it is with true biblical understanding. Also, faith is a critical factor in achieving the spiritual comprehension necessary to understand the Bible. One must be convinced beyond the scope of the experimentally controlled and repeatable data demanded by scientists as verified “proof,” that God exists and the Bible is His inspired Word. The faith for such an absolute belief comes only through God’s Holy Spirit.

3. The message of the Bible is theological. The Bible is not a history or science text. Its purpose is *not* to dictate on matters of art, technology, personal taste, or the vast world of knowledge, which man is capable of discovering for himself by the precious gift of man’s God-given mental capacities. Rather, the Bible gives those essential theological and religious truths, which man could *not* find for himself through the academic disciplines.

4. The Bible contains various types of literature, each of which must be understood on its own terms. It contains history, poetry, parables, metaphors, songs, and symbolic revelation. It is often a record of those things, which it elsewhere condemns, such as false opinions, lies, misunderstandings, deceptions, and heinous sins of every type.

5. The biblical message is gained from the Bible as a whole, not from reading a verse or two in iso-

lation or otherwise “proof-texting,” because what may seem to be an affirmative, or blanket statement in one passage can be *greatly qualified* or expanded upon elsewhere. The picture given by one book may be somewhat altered in light of the teachings in another. One must perceive and comprehend the full spectrum of biblical doctrine in general to properly understand any specific element in particular.

6. The resources of modern scholarship, *properly handled*, can add insight, detail, and historical color to the basic biblical message and context. God designed the Bible so the essential message can be clear to any Spirit-led person humbly seeking to learn the plan of salvation expressed in His Word. Clearly, an uneducated Christian reading an inadequate translation will be able to understand the fundamental doctrines necessary for salvation. Nonetheless, a technical understanding of ancient languages, literature, history, society, and other information put at our disposal by contemporary scholarship *will enhance* a person’s total understanding of the Bible. The various books of the Bible were not written in a vacuum. To *achieve* a deeper understanding of their teachings, one must strive to grow in the knowledge of the history and background of the Bible, and the cultures in which they arose. This will only improve a Christian’s scholarly knowledge, which only comes from God. This extracurricular information will in turn embellish and enhance his spiritual understanding.

7. Because society is dynamic—always changing—there has to be an institution to clarify the Bible for the Christian in the age in which he lives (Acts 8:31). Recognizing this, Jesus Christ established and sustains His Church, to which He has given the responsibility for determining how to apply the Bible in particular situations for resolving differences between various individual Christians. Even though the Bible stands at the foundation of Christian belief, the Church can still come to decisions under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which were not specified in the pages of the Bible itself. For example, Moses modified the statutes and judgments of Israel for an agrarian society. Paul made decisions by extrapolating principles from his knowledge of the Scriptures (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:12). And so today, the Church can render judgments based on biblical laws and principles in order to keep itself

relevant and vital in our modern age as well.

The essential element here is *unity* of the believers and *coherence* of the Church. Members of the Church must have a common body of beliefs, traditions, customs, practices, and procedures in order to remain united. And this degree of *unity* is vital if a collective work is to be done. A Christian in isolation will have to render his own judgments, and two such Christians will not always agree. But if we must have fellowship together (which God says we need for our spiritual development), if we must be in the same Church together (which God states is critical for our spiritual sustenance), and if we must accomplish a major work together (which is our collective, God-given commission), then a body of competent persons must be authorized to finalize doctrine, discern interpretations, administrate decisions, etc. And such a body can be established only by and through the Church as it is led by Jesus Christ.

In summary, Christians should *study* the Bible diligently, *respect* it as the Word of God, and *seek* its guidance through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26; 16:13) and the teachings of the Church. In order to become like God, we must seek to understand the Bible, which is the clearest expression of God’s mind. We can only hope to achieve this through profound and regular Bible study, and the internalized implementation of its precepts and values.

God’s Word is a totally unique collection of writings absolutely profound in every sense, making commonly available to all mankind the words of life—the hope for today and the promise of tomorrow. It is man’s *responsibility and privilege* to seek out the incredible depths and riches of God’s mind as revealed in His Word.

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JESUS CHRIST

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God, and the Son of Man. He was the prophesied Messiah of the Old Testament and is described in the New Testament as being fully human and fully divine. As the second member of the God family, He has existed throughout eternity as the “Word.” He divested Himself of this power and His majesty, and became a human being to die for the sins of all mankind as our loving and merciful Savior. After three days and three nights, He was resurrected to immortality. He ascended to heaven to become our High Priest and will, at some undisclosed date, return to establish the Kingdom of God on earth and rule as King of Kings with His saints forever.

Deuteronomy 18:15; Matthew 17:15–17; John 1:1–14; 3:16; Acts 2:32–33; Romans 5:8; Philippians 2:7; Hebrews 4:14–15; Revelation 1:13–16

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone and foundation of Christianity, the focal point of both Old and New Testaments and biblical prophecy. He is the one whom God’s plan of redemption and salvation revolves around (Col.1:9–22).

Christ as the “Word of God” (Jn. 1:1) has existed with the Father from eternity. Together, He and the Father devised a plan to *reproduce themselves* and expand their family by means of the human creation. This creation as accomplished by the one who became Christ through the agency and power of the Holy Spirit. “For by Him [Christ] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible” (Col. 1:16). John adds that “all things were made by Him: and without Him was not any thing made that was made” (Jn. 1:3). Thus the “Word of God”—Christ—was also the actual Creator God, who fashioned the universe (Heb. 1:2) and breathed the breath of life into Adam.

As was clarified in the statement on God, we understand that God (the Father) and the Word (the

being who became Jesus Christ) were the God (the Elohim) of the Old Testament. It is important to understand that before Jesus’ human birth, He and the Father existed as God (Gen. 1:26). But it was the Word (the one who later became Jesus Christ) who walked with Noah and talked with Abraham and appeared to Moses (Gen. 7:1; Ex. 3:14). In actuality, both were *represented* as the God of Israel, the God, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who gave His law to Moses at Sinai. However, He (the Word) was the One actually leading Israel as a cloud by day and protected them as a pillar of fire by night. He was Israel’s Protector, their Guide and their “Rock” (“and that Rock was Christ”—1 Cor. 10:4). Both are *represented* as the God of David and the one God (the Elohim) who dwelled in Solomon’s temple. God—the Father and Jesus—were *represented*, together, through Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and all the prophets and inspired the entirety of the Old Testament. The New Testament clearly identifies the Father of Jesus Christ as the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Acts 3:13) and the One who “spoke...by the prophets” (Heb. 1:1–2)—so we understand the Scriptures show Jesus alone was not the God of the Old Testament—He and the Father act together (in agreement) as one (John 10:30), both *represented* by the Word’s interaction with mankind.

In order to fulfill the divine master plan of salvation, this great being (the Word) divested Himself of all His power, might, and majesty, and took upon Himself “the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7; Heb. 2:14–18). As envisioned, however darkly, by Abraham and Moses, and as prophesied by Isaiah and others, God’s “Word” was now incarnate, the Son of God and the Son of man. As a human being, Jesus led a sinless, perfect life although He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). He overcame Satan’s temptations and qualified to replace him as ruler of this world (Jn. 12:31; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 11:15). He was our example who learned obedience through suffering (Heb. 2:10; 5:8). He became our Savior whose atoning death *paid the death penalty* for all the sins of mankind (1 Tim. 2:6; Mark 10:45; 1 Pet. 3:18).

This great personal sacrifice by Christ’s crucifixion is a perfect illustration of Jesus’ love and mercy toward us. In Christ’s own words the greatest love a man can have is to “lay down his life for his

friends” (Jn. 15:13). And Jesus’ sacrifice for us is even more powerfully poignant in that “while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8), “when we were [still] enemies” (verse 10) and not yet friends, Jesus laid down His life for us. Certainly the giving of His life on the cross for all humanity was the greatest example of the greatest love that can be shown.

Christ’s resurrection from the dead was the focal point of universal history—an event of ultimate importance unequalled in the unfolding of God’s master plan. His burial for three days and three nights and subsequent resurrection was the very sign and proof of His Messiahship (Matt. 12:40). His resurrection proved that man could be resurrected also; it put in place the key element of God’s plan and illustrated the method by which human beings could eventually be resurrected to eternal life as well.

The death of Christ—the Creator of everything—was designed “from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8) and was able to pay the penalty for the sins of humanity because His life was worth more than the sum total of all the lives of mankind who have ever lived or ever will live (1 Jn. 2:2). Upon repentance and baptism, we have the opportunity to take advantage and be the beneficiaries of Christ’s sacrifice that paid the penalty for our own personal sins, and through God’s grace receive the gift of eternal life—which Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection made possible (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:23).

Christ has now ascended and is exalted at the right hand of God the Father at the throne of heaven (Ps. 110:1; Matt. 22:44). He is once again actually God, *all-powerful* and shining in the spirit realm like the sun (Rev. 1:13–16), yet with the same mercy and compassion He exemplified during His physical life. Jesus is the first of the first fruits of salvation, the first mortal to be made immortal—the first human being to become an actual born member of the God family (1 Cor. 15:23). He is every Christian’s elder brother and the forerunner of our salvation, the consummate High Priest and Advocate, Intercessor and Mediator before God’s throne of mercy on our behalf.

Although Christ is under the Father in authority (Jn. 14:28), it is through Christ we learn of the Father (John 1:18). Christ is the “express image” of the Father (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:15), and “he that hath seen [Christ] hath seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). Thus

we learn of the Father, of His plan, His ways, His character, His laws, and His love through His *first begotten* and “*firstborn*” Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, today, is the living head of His Church, actively, intelligently, and personally guiding and directing it through the Holy Spirit of God (Col. 1:17–18). He is simultaneously fully involved in the relentless sweep of mankind’s historical events as He prepares to intervene in the end time of world history, returning to earth in full power and authority to take over the governments of this earth and set up His divine Kingdom of God as King of kings and Lord of lords (Dan. 7: 13–14; Rev. 11:15–19).

Christ, who began the creation, will also finish it—He is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last (Rev. 21:6). After the completion of His 1,000-year rule, Jesus Christ will turn everything over to His Father (1 Cor. 15:24), and God the Father Himself will join His innumerable multitude of spirit-composed immortal sons as the new heaven and new earth are created (Rev. 21). God and His family will then rule the universe forever, and of “the increase of His government...there shall be no end” (Isa. 9:7).

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HOLY SPIRIT

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The Holy Spirit is the essence, power, mind, and spiritual extension and presence of God. God begets Christians as His sons and daughters through this Spirit. It strengthens a Christian spiritually, converts his mind, and serves as an earnest or guarantee of eternal life. The Spirit is the power by which God will raise His people from the dead and transform them into immortal spirit beings, thus completing the process of conversion.

John 5:25–29; Acts 1:8; 2:38; Romans 8:9–11, 14; 1 Corinthians 2:9–16; 15:42–55; Ephesians 1:13–14

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Holy Spirit is described in the Bible as “the Spirit of God,” “the Spirit of the Lord,” “the Spirit of Jesus Christ,” “the Spirit of truth,” and “comforter,” or “advocate.” It is the power of God, the mind of God and the extended means by which God accomplishes His work throughout the universe. As such, the Holy Spirit is not a separate being; it has no independent existence as an individual entity or person within the Godhead (Acts 2:17; Rom 8:26; 1 Cor. 8:6; Gal. 1:3).

There is much evidence in Scripture indicating that the Holy Spirit is not a third person within the Godhead. For instance:

Matthew’s account tells us Mary “was found with child of the Holy Spirit” (1:18), yet Jesus does not refer to the Spirit as his Father. *The Father is Jesus’ father.*

In Luke 11:15 and Matthew 12:28 we see the “Spirit of God” and “finger of God” are interchanged. This and many other passages show that when biblical authors wrote of the Spirit of God they were generally speaking of the presence, power, and activity of the invisible God in the natural world. A person who was “full of the Holy Spirit” was a person experiencing the power of God in his life. The Spirit is often described in personal terms because it is the Spirit of a personal God. The biblical writers did not have in mind a “third person” when they wrote of the “Spirit of God,” Spirit of Christ,” Spirit of the Lord,” “Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead,” “Spirit of truth,” and “Holy Spirit.”

Trinitarian dogma is not part of the New Testament. The authors refer to God in family terms—Father and Son—but the Holy Spirit is never described this way. Rather, the Spirit is the “finger of God” (Lk. 11:20; cf., Matt. 12:28) and is compared with a “dove” (Matt. 3:16), a “rushing mighty wind” (Acts 2:2), and “rivers of living waters” (John 7:38). The Spirit is never presented as a Mother or Daughter or second Son. Paul’s salutations consistently mention God the Father and Jesus Christ but leave out the Holy Spirit. For

example...

First Corinthians 1:3: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

First Timothy 1:2: “Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Surely Paul did not believe the Holy Spirit was the third person of a Trinity.

It was through His Spirit that God created the earth (Gen. 1:2). It was through this Spirit that David received his moral strength (Psa. 51:10–13), and by it Elijah and Elisha—men with normal physical proclivities and weaknesses—were made into powerful prophets of God (2 Kings 2:9, 15). Even though these men and others had access to God’s Spirit, it is also clear that they were among the relative few who in the Old Testament era were blessed with the privilege of actually having the mind and power of God work with or dwell within them.

God uses His Spirit to accomplish all His work. Whether causing prophets to prophesy, kings to reign, craftsmen to create (Ex. 31:3), bodies to be moved (Ezek. 3:12, 14), or people to keep His laws (Ezek. 36:26–27), everything God does is through the power of His Spirit.

God is spirit (Jn. 4:24); both members of the Godhead (*Elohim*), Father and Son, are literally composed of spirit; they are wholly made of spiritual essence, in the same fashion as we are made of physical particles. Yet God the Father and Jesus Christ are separate beings; each maintains His own distinct identity; and each, therefore, utilizes His own “Spirit,” though both the Father’s Spirit and Christ’s Spirit are an integral part of the common Holy Spirit. The being who later became Jesus Christ was the divine person who revealed Himself to the patriarchs and prophets and worked with them. When He utilized His mind, His nature, and His power, He was doing so through the Holy Spirit, which was the projection of His own unique, perfect spiritual power. The Father-Son relationship was not fully revealed until Jesus Christ came (Matt. 11:27). God the Father was the one who begot Jesus Christ; He did so through His Spirit, which is the same Spirit He begets spiritual children through today. Indeed, God the Father has *retained to Himself* the unique capacity to beget new spiritual beings.

Under the New Covenant the Spirit of the Father has been made available in a universal way, as was

explained by Peter on the day of Pentecost when the Church began (Acts 2:17–18). Before His death, Christ promised His disciples the Holy Spirit, which then worked with them should be given to them and actually be in them (Jn. 14:17). This “Comforter” should teach the disciples all things and remind all of them about what He had taught (Jn. 14:26).

This same Spirit, which was given to the disciples on the day of Pentecost, is available to all whom God calls. Upon true repentance granted by God and upon true belief in Jesus Christ, one may be baptized and then receive God’s Spirit through the laying-on-of-hands ceremony performed by God’s servants (Acts 2:38; 8:12–17). God further states that He gives His Holy Spirit only to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). God’s Holy Spirit is efficacious—it creates deep changes within the individual, actually converting or changing the type of mind the person possesses. The Holy Spirit generates within Christians its very “fruit,” which “is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Gal. 5:22–23). It encourages us through trials and empowers us to do the Work of God. The existence of the miraculous “gifts of the Spirit” (1 Cor. 12)—healing, tongues, prophetic revelations, etc.—in the time of the apostles does not mean Christians in every time and place can expect to receive these gifts. When and where God bestows miraculous spiritual gifts upon individuals is entirely up to Him. God can certainly grant to anyone at any time any of the spiritual gifts, but it appears that the gifts of the Spirit may occur at “significant times,” such as the birth of the New Testament Church and, possibly, during the “end time” generation (Acts 2; Joel 2:28–32).

All of us can look for evidence of the Holy Spirit in our own lives, and pray we don’t deceive ourselves in accessing our personal progress in our walk with God (2 Pet. 3:3–7; Philip. 2:12). Once a person receives the precious Holy Spirit, *he must use it* in order to grow in the knowledge and grace of God. God’s Spirit gives Christians the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) to enable them to view life from a godly perspective *instead of a selfish one*. It is this power that gives us the capacity to obey God. The deep mystery of the plan of God for mankind cannot be completely and totally understood without the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:7–10).

Of even greater significance is the fact that through

this Spirit we are actually “begotten” as sons of God and become members of the body of Christ—the Church (1 Cor. 12). The seed of this Holy Spirit, planted by God after baptism, grows and develops spiritually within us as we grow in obedience and submission to God’s law. *The Holy Spirit is dynamic*: it flows from God to and through the Christian and is expressed in his attitudes and actions. *The more we use God’s Spirit the stronger our new spiritual life becomes*. Finally, at the resurrection, this spiritual part of us becomes the totality of our composition and essence and overtakes the physical, so “that mortality [our physical essence] might be swallowed up of [spiritual] life” (2 Cor. 5:4).

God’s Word reveals the Holy Spirit is an “earnest”—a formal pledge or assurance—of eternal life, which God has implanted within us, making us sons. As long as this Spirit is living within us, we are actually sons of God and brothers of Christ. “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom. 8:9). “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). Indeed, the presence of the Holy Spirit is the best criterion to define the true Christian: it is his only real ratification, for one cannot be a true Christian without it. As long as we nurture the Holy Spirit, and continue to renew it daily within us (2 Cor. 4:16) through prayer and diligent study of God’s Word, then this earnest of God’s Spirit is the *absolute guarantee* that we will be resurrected to spiritual life at Christ’s return (cf. Eph. 1:14).

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MANKIND

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The greatest truth of the Bible is that God is *reproducing Himself* through mankind. Hence, humanity’s goal and purpose for existence is, ultimately, to

enter God's family and become literal sons of God. Human beings are physical beings with *no inherent immortality*, but they can receive eternal life as a *free gift* from God. Man was created by God to be wholly flesh and blood, yet in God's image and with a spiritual component—the “spirit in man”—included in his brain, which together compose the human mind.

Genesis 1:26–27; Job 32:8; Psalm 22:9–10; 71:5–6; 139:13–14; Ecclesiastes 3:21; 11:5; 12:7; Isaiah 44:2, 24; Jeremiah 1:5; Zechariah 12:1; Acts 2:38; Romans 8:16; 1 Corinthians 2:11–15; 1 John 5:11–13

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

To understand that God is reproducing Himself through mankind is *absolutely essential* for understanding the nature of man. The fact that human beings were made with the potential and destiny for entering God's family as His *literal children* and thereby actually share His God-level plane of existence is *fundamental* to our knowledge of who and what we are.

Man was created as a physical being, a “living soul” (Gen. 2:7). The English word “soul” is translated from the Hebrew word *nephesh* and simply means a “living, breathing creature.” The same word is used in reference to all “breath-bearing life” (which is a good working definition of *nephesh*—animal as well as human life). *Nephesh* refers to animals in Genesis 1:20, 21, 24; 2:19; 9:10, 12, 15 (where it is translated “creature”) and also Genesis 1:30; 9:4; Leviticus 11:10; 17:11, etc. (Note a legitimate, literal translation of Genesis 1:20: “Let the waters swarm with a swarm of living souls.”)

The Greek equivalent of *nephesh* is *psuche*, which also literally means “breath,” animal as well as human (Rev. 8:9; 16:3). Thus, the biblical “soul” is just the physical life of man and beast—man and beast alike. Solomon makes the point clear: “For man's fate is a beast's fate, one fate befalls them both; as the one dies so the other dies, the same breath is in them all” (Eccles. 3:19, Moffatt).

Interestingly enough, *nephesh* is also used to represent “dead bodies”—“dead *nepheshes*” or “dead souls” (Lev. 21:11; Num. 6:6, 11, etc.). The biblical “soul,” then, can simply become the “body,” and when it dies it dies all over. Thus man *is* a living soul

that lives and dies as does any animal soul; therefore, man neither has nor is an “immortal soul.”

Ezekiel *twice* states that “the soul that sinneth it shall die” (Ezek. 18:4, 20). Jesus proclaimed that both the body and the soul can be destroyed in hell (Matt. 10:28). John agreed: “no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” (1 Jn. 3:15), and Paul concurred: “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

In Psalm 146:4 we read that when man's “breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in the very day *his thoughts perish*.” Solomon wrote that “*the dead know not anything*” (Eccles. 9:5). Clearly, then, when a human being dies, he is indeed mentally as well as physically dead—*wholly unconscious, unaware, unknowing*. The example of David confirms this. Here was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), the eternal king of Israel (Ezek. 37:24); yet Peter stated: “David...is both *dead and buried*, and...is *not* ascended into the heavens” (Acts 2:29, 34).

Although man and animals have identically mortal “souls,” man has been created superior to animals in a number of important respects. First, God shows that man was made in His own “image” and “likeness” (Gen. 1:26)—and therefore carries the general appearance of God, unlike the animals that are simply made “after their kind.” In addition, God has given “the spirit of man” to humans. This “spirit in man,” a nonphysical component which God designed to combine with the human brain to form the human mind, is the primary factor which distinguishes man from animals, *elevating* man's mental capacity from the wholly physical to the spiritual. The spirit in man imparts godlike abilities and capacities. This affords man to experience a likeness to God in his mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions; however, man is presently limited to the physical dimension while God lives and moves in the spiritual dimension. Man is *physical and mortal*, but through the spirit in man has the potential of moving into the God-plane level of existence and becoming spiritual and ultimately, immortal.

The spirit in man, then, is that *essence* which *imparts* the power of the human mind to physical brain tissue. It is the means by which man exercises his promised “dominion” over all other creatures (Gen. 1:26).

The spirit in man is *not* an “immortal soul”; it has *absolutely no consciousness apart* from the brain. Job speaks of such a spirit: “it is a spirit in man...that

giveth them understanding” (Job 32:8, *Jewish Pub. Soc.*). Paul asks, “What human being can understand the thoughts of a man except [by means of] the spirit of man which is in him” (1 Cor. 2:11; *Moffatt*; ccf. *KGJ*). This simply states that self-consciousness—the awareness of thoughts—not just the thoughts themselves, are generated by the spirit in man. The spirit of man is not the man, but rather a *spiritual essence*, which provides man with an utterly unique characteristic of self-awareness and mind actualization, thus lifting him far above the level of mere animal intelligence.

Zechariah shows that the Eternal God of Israel “formeth the spirit of man within him” (Zech. 12:1). No immortal soul here—the “spirit of man” and the “him” are separate entities, with the former located “within” the latter. Paul confirms this “spirit of man” is “in him” (1 Cor. 2:11). This *does not say* that man is a spirit, but rather this “spirit” is located *in the man*. (If a man swallows a marble, that marble would be in him, but that *does not* make the man a marble.)

If we are not careful, we can very quickly begin to think the spirit in man possesses conscious sensation, thought, and awareness, independent of the brain. This is wholly wrong. The spirit in man, of itself, cannot sense, cannot think, cannot reason, and cannot know. The brain performs these tasks. But to engender the exquisite qualities, which constitute the human mind, the spirit in man must be added within the man.

We can liken the spirit in man to a blank recording tape or CD disk and the human brain to a player/recorder—neither one is able to generate the information on the disk without the other. The player/recorder houses all the mechanics required for its particular operation—that of sound reproduction. Likewise, the human brain contains all the necessary structures and circuits—the mechanics for its manifold responsibilities—which are sensation, memory, emotion, creativity, etc. Just as the player/recorder produces nothing without the disk running through it, so the human brain is severely limited *without the spirit* in man joined to it. The disk imparts the capacity of audio reproduction to the player/recorder; this same disk also records and stores the etched impress from the player/recorder. Analogously, the spirit in man imparts the capacity of creative intellect and self-conscious personality to the brain, while at the same time recording and

storing the etched impression (like the disk) from the brain (the player/recorder) of the individual.

At death, the spirit in man “tape/disk” is complete—it contains, at that time, the incredibly detailed, indelible record of every nuance of life, thought, personality, attitude, and character which made one exactly the singular individual he was. The “tape/disk” can then be “filed”—until needed again for reactivation, an event called the “resurrection” in biblical terminology. Solomon alludes to this “filing” of the spirit in man as well as to the mortality of the man in Ecclesiastes 12:7: “Then [at death] shall the dust [the human being] return to the earth as it was: and the spirit [the spirit-in-man tape/disk] shall return unto God who gave it.”

Again, we can easily make the mistake of attributing consciousness to this filed-away “tape/disk” which is no more the former living individual than a boxed audio recording CD disk is the peaceful third movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. In order to reconstitute those serene musical vibrations from the CD disk, the disk must be reinserted into a player/recorder. Similarly, in order to reconstitute the specific person’s conscious awareness from the “spirit-in-man disk,” the spirit in man must be reinserted into a brain. Therefore, a reconstituted brain and body (whether spiritual or physical) are necessary adjuncts to the spirit-in-man disk in order to reactivate—or resurrect—the original individual.

Man was *created physical, mortal*, and limited so God could work with and prepare him for his ultimate destiny. God’s moral character is self-determined by His own free choice. If man is to be like Him and share eternity on His level, he must also be free to make his own decisions and thus *build* his own character. Physical life provides the arena for man to learn the object lessons necessary to become like God in character (Eccl. 12:13–14; Acts 14:22; Rom. 5:3–5; 8:17–18; 2 Cor. 4:16–17; Heb. 12:5–11; Jas. 1:2–4, 12; 1 Pet. 4:12–19; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26–28; 3:5, 12, 21). This kind of character can be developed only through time and experience.

Freedom of choice requires the possibility of rejecting God’s character and way of life. If a man, given every conceivable opportunity over a protracted period of time, becomes set in the kind of moral character which would poison him and his environment, God in His infinite mercy and wisdom *would not* endow that man with eternal life and

unlimited potential as an immortal spirit being (Matt. 25:46; Rom. 2:7–9; Gal. 5:19–21; Mal. 4:1–3; Rom. 6:23).

The Bible states when God created man, He “saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). Man was not created with an evil nature. This is confirmed in Ecclesiastes 7:29: “Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright.” However, *neither* was man *created* with the righteous, holy character of God, which is impossible to create instantaneously. One might say man was *created morally neutral* so he could *develop* moral character through experiencing life (Deut. 30:11–14; Rom. 6:16; Jer. 10:23; Ezek. 18:20).

Although as a free moral agent, with the full capacity to make his own decisions, man is subject to influences. As part of the human learning and growing process, God allowed Satan, the ultimate source of evil, to influence man for this period of human history. Much of what can be called the natural mind—the mind adverse to God’s mind—is a result of Satan’s influence as well as wrong choices made by man as he lives and experiences life without God’s guidance. It is important to understand that God *did not create* man with an intrinsically evil nature but rather with free choice, subject to the influences of both good and evil.

All humans are born morally neutral, as was Adam upon his creation. Unfortunately, Adam *chose* to follow Satan the Devil and, sadly, he sinned, causing his outlook and frame of mind to become evil and perverted. Likewise, as we sin, our minds become perverted from their moral neutrality and instead, we too become self-oriented, filled with vanity, jealousy, lust, and greed. Satan’s mindset becomes our mindset—oriented in opposition to God’s mind. The Bible states that “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7), and that man’s “heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9)—clearly reflecting in both scriptures Satan’s attitude.

Satan is called “the prince of the power of the air,” the “spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” This indicates that Satan’s influence is enormous. In fact, the devil “deceives the whole world” (Rev 12:9).

The only antidote to Satan’s influence—the *remedy required* to change the heart of man—is God’s

Holy Spirit. It is impossible for man to obey God in the full spirit of the law without it. And this is precisely what God wants us to learn: that we desperately need God’s Holy Spirit in order to have our minds and hearts converted, to have our whole direction of life changed to follow God’s way.

The spirit in man, of itself, *is incomplete*. Indeed, it elevates man’s mental capacity to the spiritual plane, but all this does is cause spiritual problems without any spiritual solutions. The existence of the spirit in man clearly demonstrates our *burning need* of the missing dimension of the Spirit of God. Thus the reality of the spirit in man becomes the *focal point* of all human life. And it is in the arena of human survival that the spirit in man takes on *monumental significance* because the mere existence of a spiritual component in the human mind unveils the *fundamental cause* underlying all of mankind’s troubles.

Consider what the spirit in man signifies; the human mind operates with a spiritual dimension, and that means spiritual problems. The spirit in man adds spiritual problems to the physical human brain. (The human mind and its resultant spiritual problems are directly related together as are the animal brain and its resultant instinctive behavioral patterns. Thus, while the animal brain maintains perfect harmony in nature, the human mind is about to utterly destroy the earth!)

That is the crux of the matter—that is why mankind is planning its own extinction: human beings have spiritual problems but only physical solutions—and physical solutions *cannot solve* spiritual problems. This is why the spirit in man must become the *focal point* of all human knowledge, because it enables us to understand—for the first time—that all of man’s physical difficulties *are caused* by deep-seated spiritual complications. No amount of physical measures—no matter how intricate or expensive—will ever improve the overall welfare and happiness of the human race. If we ever hope to solve our physical problems and have an abundantly happy world, our *spiritual* problems must be solved first.

The spirit in man is the key to man. The knowledge of it should reorient us. It points us in the proper direction. It tells us where we must look if we are to ever have a happy, joyful, and peaceful planet.

Spiritual solutions are needed to solve spiritual problems. If this one fundamental point were understood, humanity would be forced to realize the

structure of his entire society—from the government of nations to the behavior of children—*needs radical revision* before people can finally be joyfully busy with peace and progress.

This is where God's plan of salvation comes in. God first calls us by opening our minds to His truth, leading us to recognize our wretched, sinful state, cut off from God. Then upon our heartfelt repentance and sincere acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Saviour, God enables us through baptism and the laying on of hands, to receive His Spirit. Conversion by God's Holy Spirit means a *renewing* of one's mind (Rom. 12:2), a complete changing of one's attitude and heart; it is the *creation* of a new man, walking in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). Through God's Spirit man can have the fellowship and communion with God, which is so important to growth in God's mind and character.

It is not fully revealed how God's Spirit actually works. We know it alters our whole mental outlook and direction in life from evil to good, from satanic to godly—yet how does it do this? Romans 8:16 explains God's Holy Spirit "itself beareth witness with our spirit [in man] that we are the children of God." This begins to show God's Holy Spirit functions by working through the spirit in man, which is the intrinsic spiritual component of every human mind. If we view conversion as a begettal process, it becomes a biblical analogy of spiritual conception, likened to physical conception. This provides us a working model for understanding how God's Holy Spirit is impregnating and energizing man's spirit much as a male sperm impregnates and energizes a female ovum. (There are many spiritually instructive understandings and extrapolations to be derived from this analogy.) Thus the spirit in man becomes the *focal point* of human existence; it is the *one essential element* differentiating us from animals; and, at the same time, it is both (1) our link with the divine, giving us the full potential for spiritual conception and development through God's Holy Spirit, and (2) the vehicle through which Satan can influence us.

Although the negative or evil side of man must be dealt with, the Church of God chooses to focus on the positive and awesome potential of mankind. This is the *heart and core* of the message Jesus brought to man. Through God's grace and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ man *can be forgiven* of his wrong choices and sins. God in His infinite love

and wisdom has provided a plan by which man can, as a free moral agent, gain the experience and character necessary to receive eternal life. If the spiritual essence God gives us at baptism continues to grow within us, we will personally *be born* into God's everlasting family at the resurrection. Conversely, God shall destroy, in the lake of fire any who absolutely refuse to repent and obey Him—by analogy, they will be *spiritually aborted*. From this we draw the conclusion that there is no "second chance" for those who totally reject God and His way *after* having been enlightened—their end is to be burned (Heb. 6:8; Rev. 20:14–15). But not having a "second chance" presupposes that every person must really have a full first chance for salvation. This means that God can *only condemn* unrepentant, deliberate sinners "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" (Heb. 6:4–5). To have a real opportunity for salvation, to be judged by God, human beings must *really know* the truth (Heb. 10:26–31).

Since it is God's will and purpose for all men to reach their full potential as sons of God, all men shall have a *full and fair opportunity* to actualize that potential. Thus human beings will become members of the family of God, and God's family will grow into an innumerable multitude. The lengthy history of man's mostly negative experience is only one phase of God's plan, not the final chapter.

The ultimate destiny of man is truly beyond our limited comprehension now, although God does give us certain hints. God's purpose is to put "all things"—*everything*—including the whole universe, under man (Heb. 2:8). Not only are human beings promised eternal life but also the sharing of all that it means to be in the family of God. God's greatest desire is to share everything with us. His only concern: that His sons *be prepared* in character, attitude, and experience for that fabulous destiny.

Thus we see that God *did not conclude* His spiritual creation in the first seven days recorded in Genesis 1 and 2. Rather, those chapters record the physical creation of man. God is now working with man spiritually and creating His own character in man so in time he might be "born again," but this time into God's Kingdom, sharing God's greatness as a veritable son of God for eternity. Earth is thus the proving ground where human beings can gain the character

necessary to rule with God for all time. (In the Church of God tradition, we teach that “Character” includes the ability to **know** what’s right, **choose** what’s right, and **do** what’s right. God can help with our **knowing** and **doing** right. but the free moral agency in man must **choose** to follow God’s ways rather than the often destructive alternatives.)

Although the ultimate purpose of human life is to be fulfilled at the resurrection, God *does not neglect* the present physical life. Indeed the fulfillment, abundance, happiness, and success of this human life are an integral part of God’s plan. The entirety of the book of Proverbs is filled with instructions and exhortations explaining how men, women, and children should act in order to achieve the maximum success in their lives. God truly wants all of mankind to prosper, with everyone *achieving* his or her own *fullest individual potential* in all areas of living: social, economic, intellectual, family, and personal. Jesus Christ stated, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10). And the apostle John gives it additional perspective: “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health” (3 Jn. 2). In line with God’s most *magnificent truth* of man’s destiny, the Church of God *upholds* and seeks to *promote* the dignity and integrity of man in every facet of human life.

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ANGELIC REALM

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

God has created powerful spirit beings as His agents and messengers. Since man’s creation, these spirit beings have functioned as ministering spirits to help mankind attain salvation. Like man, angels have free moral agency. Although created to help God, some of them—led by Satan the devil—

rebelled against God’s government, transforming into the evil spirits known as demons.

Psalms 91:11–12; Ephesians 6:12; Hebrews 1:7

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Before the time of man, God created powerful spirit beings (Job 38:7) in vast numbers (Rev.5:11). Although created before and on a higher plane than man, these beings will eventually be subject to man’s authority when humanity enters God’s family (Heb. 2:7–8).

The Bible gives relatively few specifics about the numerous types and responsibilities of these spirit beings, mentioning them in context but not dwelling on them specifically. Apparently, all of these created spirit beings of whatever variety or power are generally labelled as “angels,” although the Bible *nowhere directly* makes that statement. The English word “angel” comes from the Greek word *angelos*, which means “messenger” or “agent.” The Hebrew word *malak* has the same meaning.

A number of specific types of angels are generally described. Cherubim are explained in Ezekiel 1 and 10 as having four wings and four faces (of a lion, ox, eagle, and man) and covering (or carrying) God’s throne. Seraphim are “full of eyes before and behind,” having six wings and appearing either like a lion, a calf, an eagle, or with the face of a man (Is. 6:2–3; Rev. 4:6–8). “Twenty-four elders” who apparently serve as counsellors for God Himself are described in Revelation 4:4, 10–11. Angels have at times appeared on earth, materializing as men (Gen. 19:1–2), although it is not revealed whether this indeed is their actual form or whether they assumed the appearance of humans specifically for their visit. (Some have wondered since the physical world reflects the spiritual world—Rom. 1:20—could some of the animals on earth be, in some fashion, physical counterparts of angelic beings? cf. Rev. 19:11.)

Although the above scriptures make plain that God assigned angels various responsibilities, Hebrews 1:14 states they are also commissioned to help man attain salvation. “Are they not all spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?” The exact way or manner in

which angels minister to humanity in this capacity is not comprehensively described in the Bible, but there are some references. Cherubim were sent to guard the way to the tree of life after Adam and Eve were cast from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). Parts of the law were given by angels (Acts 7:35; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). In Genesis 18, angelic beings came to tell Abraham he would have a son, and in Genesis 19, they helped rescue Lot from the city of Sodom before it burned. Angels ministered to Jesus Christ after He withstood Satan for forty days and nights (Mat. 4:11). Matthew 18:10 suggest that God's angels watch over God's converted sons. Likewise we are told "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10). The angels even desire to "look into" the specifics of salvation (2 Pet. 1:12). One angel seems to be assigned to each of the seven churches in Revelation 2–3 (Rev. 1:20); and different angels will be intimately involved in God's future intervention in world affairs (Rev. 7:1–2; Ez. 9; Rev. 8:3–5; 10:1, etc.), specifically in the final seven trumpets (Rev. 8:6 ff) and the seven final plagues (Rev. 15:1 ff). Further verses can be cited to show other specifically revealed times when angels have served man physically or spiritually. The thrust of all these passages is that the angels play an important role in God's salvation plan for man, and that their relationship with man is one of interest and personal care and concern.

The rebellion and fall of Babylon and Tyre and their rulers (Isa. 14; Ezek. 28) mirror the prehistoric rebellion, fall, and ultimate destruction of a powerful spirit being, one of the cherubim. His name in Latin is the familiar word Lucifer; he had the honor of covering the very throne of God (Ezek. 28:14), indicating a position of very high authority and power in God's government. However, he was lifted up in his own vanity, became resentful and jealous of God, and finally rebelled against God's government. He drew with him as cohorts a third of the angels (Rev. 12:4). These became evil angels or demons with Lucifer, now Satan the devil (the adversary), as their leader.

Satan is called the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4) and the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10). Some form of satanic "spirit" is now at work in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). These attitudes form as a result of day-to-day exposure to the sinful ways of a world influenced by Satan (Eph. 2:1–3). By this

means, Satan and his demonic allies hope to destroy all human beings and ruin their chance for entering the family of God. These wicked spirits try to separate Christians from the love of God (cf. Rom. 8:38–39). A primary battle of a Christian is "against wicked spirits in high places" (Eph. 6:12). It is a battle to resist the influences of Satan and his demons against their efforts to control a person's mind.

God has given us the means to fight this spiritual battle. We must "put on the whole armor of God...to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11); this spiritual armor includes truth, righteousness (v. 14), peace (v. 15), faith (v. 16), salvation, the Word of God (v. 17), and prayer and supplication (v. 18). Satan our adversary "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8); but he will flee from us if we resist him and draw near to God (James 4:7–8).

While angels are now above man in authority and ability, they are not to be worshipped or prayed to, nor regarded as mediators between God and man (Col. 2:18). Nonetheless, we must, of course, acknowledge and respect their authority as powerful spiritual helpers of God and His created "sons" (Job 38:7). Even the archangel Michael dared not revile Satan the devil, but appealed to God's authority when confronting him rather than his own (Jude 9). The biblical record shows that angelic authority over man is temporary (Heb. 1:13–14), and explains that man will eventually be in the position of judging the angels (1 Cor. 6:3).

God is in supreme command and is only temporarily allowing Satan to influence man within certain confines (Job 1). This process actually enables man to build greater character by resisting Satan and, in so doing, learn to rely on God more thoroughly. During the millennial rule of Christ, Satan is to be removed from the world scene along with his demons. Jesus Christ will replace Satan as the ruler of this world (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4 and Rev. 20:4–5). But the faithful angels who have followed God throughout these countless eons of time will continue as servants of the greatly expanded family of God for all eternity.

It is understandable how some may view the angelic/spiritual realm in an extremely simplistic way. From the brief glimpses the Bible gives of God's throne (Rev. 4), one could get the naive idea that angelic beings bow before God all the time as

though in a beatific trance; repetitively incanting “holy, holy, holy...” constantly, without ever stopping or thinking. Likewise, one may think the entire spiritual realm is very ethereal, dull, and devoid of interesting diversity, when compared with the reality and tremendous variety the physical realm provides.

In actuality, this is a total misconception. The spiritual realm is the true reality while the physical realm maintains an ethereal existence; the spiritual world is the true “substance,” while the physical world is the “shadow.” We can only begin to comprehend the invisible things of the spiritual realm by observing the visible things of the physical realm (Rom. 1:20). Indeed, the incredible variety and abundance of the physical universe must be paled into insignificance by the unimaginable majesty, beauty, complexity, and diversity of the spiritual universe. The few hints seen show an abundance of spiritual “things” (which comprise just a portion of the spiritual reality) that extends incredibly far beyond even angelic beings. The

symbolism of spiritual cities, gates, rivers, trees, and fruits in Revelation 21–22; horses, armies, and swords in Revelation 19; thrones and wheels in Ezekiel 1 and 10; and thrones, clothes, crowns, gold, lightnings, thunders, voices, and lamps in Revelation 4 testify to an existence so incomprehensible that even the profuse utilization of physical analogies can scarcely do more than whet our appetite. It is incredibly amazing when considering there are spiritual books, seals, incense, vials, songs, hair, etc., with no indication of any limit to the scope of spiritual “things.” Indeed, there is every reason to conclude our present physical realm is drab, plain, and dull when compared with the unfathomable variety and ineffable splendor of the spiritual realm.

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