
Class Introduction

In the first century, the church of Christ dealt with a number of issues, from those of personal sanctity to church harmony. The history of the church found in the book of Acts tells us that one of the problems dealt with was that of doctrine.

In Acts 15 the church of Christ in Jerusalem called the apostles and elders together to discuss a problem with which they were struggling. Did a Gentile convert to Christianity need to be circumcised? Here we see the debate:

Acts 15:4-5 And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

A great deal of effort, struggle, contention and study is summed up into the next dozen verses, culminating with a determination that is of tremendous import to this day: Gentiles need not keep the law of circumcision. This decision is of great import to us now, as it set the standard for our determination of what is and is not doctrine: to first look at what is written about the matter, or seek the commandment of God:

Acts 15:15-16 "And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the LORD who does all these things.'"

Second, these same Christians looked for examples that demonstrated or revealed God's will. In this case, Peter spoke about his experience with Cornelius (recorded in chapter 10 of Acts) as a divine message that taught him the sanctity of all men:

Acts 15:7 And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles

should hear the word of the gospel and believe.”

Finally, these noble and faithful men looked to other events to draw out a necessary inference. Specifically, they saw how God had worked among the Gentiles with Paul and Barnabas, and drew the conclusion that God’s will for the Gentile convert did not include circumcision:

Acts 15:12 Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

The significance of this council is clear when we see that at no time did God intervene to end the debate. These men were left with the same measure of God’s truth that we today use to determine what is and is not doctrine. To this day we still look for God’s command, approved examples, and inferences that are necessary to formulate doctrine.

What is Biblical doctrine? We use the word doctrine (in Greek the word we translate is *didaskalia*, which is a teaching from a master) to refer to a formal or absolute teaching or law from the Word of God. Specifically, as Christians it refers to the Law or Doctrine of Christ.

The church that Jesus built is a doctrinal church, meaning it is founded on teachings that someone who believes must take on as their own. Being a Christian means being right on doctrine:

1 Timothy 4:16 Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

2 John 1:9 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

For our study, we are going to say that a doctrine is any idea that has been formalized and widely accepted.

Since this church is built on a specific and necessary form of doctrine, it naturally follows that doctrine that is found in the church that is not from God (such as the circumcision of Gentiles) is a false doctrine. The warning in the New Testament that is the cornerstone of our study is Paul’s statement in I Timothy 4:1.

1 Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith,

giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

Demonic doctrine is a powerful description of doctrine not from Christ. Yet we could conclude that if doctrine does not come from God, where would it come from? Scripture reveals that often the source of doctrine is from men, but the nature of the doctrine is itself demonic.

PRINCIPLES OF OUR STUDY

There is a lot wrong with our world today. Much of the problem lies in the hearts of men, in their lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life. But too, there is a problem that comes through the religious organizations that we deal with daily. These organizations are either explicit or implicit in the creation of doctrines for their beliefs. Our study seeks to dig into the roots of false doctrines, and pull them out with Scripture. We will not be dealing with a number of issue that are personal (such as sanctity, propriety, etc), but to the doctrines of the denominations and apostate churches of Christ.

We will only be dealing with doctrines that are popular and prevalent in our society today. If a doctrine is something no longer considered current (such as the circumcision of Gentiles, or the Puritan belief of the New World as God's new promised land) we will not mention it. If a doctrine is held by so few persons so that we are very unlikely to meet this doctrine in our times (such as the Branch Davidians and their bizarre leader), we will not include it in our study. Instead, we want to expose those doctrines that we will most likely find ourselves faced with among our religious friends, and even creeping into the church of Christ.

We will attempt to differentiate between a Christian and a *pseudo*-Christian when possible, but sometimes will refer to "Christianity" in the less distinct, worldly sense.

DENOMINATIONS

The approach of this study breaks with previous studies in that we do not single the denomination out and then describe their doctrines, but instead approach the doctrines that create denominations from the ground up. The reason is that in the modern world, many denominations are too fluid on their doctrines to be able to ascertain a specific doctrinal platform as we could in the last generation. We might cross someone who is Baptist, but their church does not accept certain doctrines that their conference does.

For the purpose of our study we are going to break down the denominations of our day into a series of groups generally agreed and accepted. It is a misunderstanding by most people today that denominations

fall into two branches: Catholic and Protestant. In fact, there are seven branches that exist even today: Catholic, Orthodox (such as Greek or Russian), Anglican (church of England), Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc), Restoration (Mormon church, etc), Oriental Orthodox (Egyptian Coptic, etc), and Eastern Christianity (Assyrian and Nestorian churches).

It is unlikely we will meet or interact with many Assyrian, Coptic or Chaldean Christians in our lives, and so their doctrines are not addressed in this text.

Chapter 1: The Nature of Man

Our first chapter seeks to understand doctrines that pertain to the nature of man. Understanding ourselves and our relationship to God is necessary before we can understand God Himself.

ORIGINAL SIN

Why do we sin? Is it possible that we sin because we have no choice but to sin? Does the Bible teach that since all fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), the necessary inference is that it is in our nature to sin? The attempt to ascertain this truth is perhaps the root of the false doctrine of Original Sin, and the subsequent doctrines of Sinful Nature and Total Depravity.

Simply stated, the doctrine of Original Sin states that when Adam sinned, all mankind bears the guilt of that sin. When Adam ate the forbidden fruit, that first sin was the “original sin” of which we are all born bearing the guilt. Thus all men are born sinners. Here is a rather clear description found in the Belgic Confession of Faith, a common Protestant creed:

"We believe that through the disobedience of Adam original sin is extended to all mankind; which is a corruption of the whole nature and a hereditary disease, wherewith even infants in their mother's womb are infected, and which produces in man all sorts of sin, being in him as a root thereof, and therefore is so vile and abominable in the sight of God that it is sufficient to condemn all mankind."

Perhaps the hardest part of this potion to swallow is that it necessarily means that children are conceived and born in sin:

"No view of infant salvation which denies original sin and total depravity is true. You get that? No view of infant salvation which denies original sin and total depravity is true. Babies are not free from sin; they are sinners." ¹

The Original Sin belonged to Adam and Eve, in breaking the principle commandment in the garden.

¹ John MacArthur, <http://www.ondoctrines.com/2mac0142.htm>

The human logic applied is to say that since the penalty for this sin was death, and all of Adam's descendants bear that penalty, the sin itself must also be passed along.

Original Sin is probably the most common and deeply rooted doctrine in the religious world today. It is far easier to name the few denominations that do not believe in a sinful nature. It is not a doctrine of the Mormon Church, Christian Churches/Disciples of Christ, or in Islam.

Perhaps its deep roots are due to the antiquity of the idea. It seems that even centuries before Christ, some Jews believed that a father's sins were passed on by God to the children. In the Old Testament we see several mentions of the Jewish proverb "*the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge*" (a proverb condemned in places such as Jeremiah 31:29 and Ezekiel 18:2). It is clear that the disciples of Jesus may have been thinking when they spoke to Jesus in John 9:

John 9:1-3 Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.

However, we do not find this idea as a formal doctrine among Christians until it was clearly established by Augustine of Hippo (354-430AD). His debates against Pelagius made the doctrine a formal part of the early Catholic church:

*"As sinners, human beings are utterly depraved in nature, lack the freedom to do good, and cannot respond to the will of God without divine grace. Grace is irresistible, results in conversion, and leads to perseverance. Augustine's idea of predestination rests on the assertion that God has foreordained, from eternity, those who will be saved. The number of the elect is fixed. God has chosen the elect certainly and gratuitously, without any previous merit (ante merita) on their part."*²

In the 16th century the Protestant reformer John Calvin refined Original Sin as a "stain" on men that renders them "totally depraved", without any ability to make a righteous decision. This idea was placed at the head of his theology that we will refer to as TULIP theology (TULIP theology, the foundation of Calvinism, is an acronym for Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irrresistible

² (Justo L. Gonzalez (1970-1975). A History of Christian Thought: Volume 2)

Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints). Calvin then explained that our Sinful Nature, inherited because of this original sin, was the explanation for the reason men make a choice to sin.

Many people who believe in Original sin have presented a series of passages as certification of the doctrine:

Exodus 20:5.....For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Romans 5:12,17 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned--..... For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

Psalm 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

Psalm 14:3 There is none who does good, No, not one.

The great harm in the doctrine of original sin is that it necessitates a number of additional doctrines to repair the damage it creates. Do you fear for the soul of your newborn child? Infant Baptism is created to give you comfort, despite the fact that Scripture necessitates understanding for baptism to provide the desired remission of sins:

Mark 16:16 "He who believes and is baptized will be saved"

Luke 13:3 "Unless you repent you will perish"

Limbo (a Catholic doctrine that was repealed as of 2007³) was created to prevent the unbaptized babe a destiny other than hell. With infant baptism came the need of Godparents (a proxy faith meant to

³ The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptized by International Theological Commission, point 3

“fill in” for the absent faith of a child) which was established to provide some form of faith for the unbelieving child, until they could reach an age of accountability for confirmation. “Confirmation” was meant to create a validation for infant baptism.

Why it is wrong: Original sin is possibly the most dangerous doctrine of demons today. It seems innocuous, but the real danger is that once it is accepted, there are a great number of subsequent doctrines to be accepted that must then follow to patch the holes of this unholy idea. If we cannot do anything right because of Original Sin, then we cannot do anything to be saved (we will see this later as “saved by Grace alone”). If there is nothing we can do to be saved, then the Holy Spirit must forcefully choose whom He will save (called the “rape of the Holy Spirit” by John Calvin), and therefore God predestines only a few to salvation. If we have no choice in our salvation, we cannot do anything to be lost (eternal security/once saved always saved). Thus original sin is the foundational doctrine for a number of evil ideas.

What happens to a person who is taught that they cannot avoid sin? The child who is told that they are wicked will then self-fulfill the prophecy, and find themselves unable to control their behavior. Men are no different; if we are told we are “born this way”, we find reasons to avoid the diligence to abstain from sin.

Perhaps we can now see why God was offended when this idea was presented to Him. He told the prophet Ezekiel to refute the idea with absolute clarity:

Ezekiel 18:1-4 The word of the LORD came to me again, saying, "What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children's teeth are set on edge'? "As I live," says the Lord GOD, "you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are Mine; The soul of the father As well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die."

The repeated theme of Scripture is that we are each held accountable for our own sins, not the sins of others (Matthew 12:36-37; Romans 2:6; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 1:17). When we examine in depth the ideas of the vengeance of God in the Old Testament, we see that the conversation is not about an inherited guilt of sin, but that the consequences of sin affect everyone. There is only one penalty for sin (Romans 6:23), and it is not physical death, but spiritual (Isaiah 59:1-4). The death we inherited from our ancestor Adam was not a penalty or guilt for sin, but a consequence. Thus even Jesus Christ, a seed of Eve (Genesis 3:15) could die, but had no sin held to His account (Hebrews 4:15).

Also, we can look at a number of statements made pertaining to the spiritual condition of children, and conclude that a doctrine which imputes guilt for sin on them must be false:

Deuteronomy 1:39 'Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.

Matthew 18:3 and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Another point to consider is that Scripture makes repeated statements that men are NOT sinful by nature. The concept of man being made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) necessarily contradicts the possibility that the same image is sinful:

Ecclesiastes 7:29 God made men upright but they sought devices.

Ezekiel 28:15 You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.

Perhaps the most commonly used passage in defense of Original Sin is David's proclamation that he was "conceived in sin" (Psalm 51:5). However, David more often proclaimed that he was seeking God from that same womb. Therefore, is it not more likely that David was using hyperbole to describe despondency, as he often did:

Psalm 71:6 By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You.

Psalm 22:10 I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God.

Finally, men who do not know God have done righteous deeds. One need only look at Cornelius, in Acts 10, who was a righteous man who did good deeds, but did not know God. When we consider the earlier statement made that there are none who do good (Psalm 14:3, the context of which refers to the atheist, not all men in general), we see too that the same writers would tell us that "*one man among a thousand I have found*" (Ecclesiastes 7:28).

Our Biblical conclusion is that sin is a choice that men make and are held accountable for when they

are competent to understand right from wrong. We are born with neither original sin nor a sinful nature, but are lured into sin by our own desires:

James 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

Chapter 2: The Nature of Divine Things

Dealing with the Nature of God is a difficult and potentially dangerous task. If we cannot agree on whether we have a soul or not, a part of our own nature, how could we hope to fathom the nature of God, who has told us that He “*is not a man*” (Number 23:19). Yet God has told us that there are aspects of His divine nature that are fathomable by men:

Romans 1:19-20 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

The false doctrines dealt with in this section pertain to those things which are spoken of in Scripture but perhaps not “seen” here in this world. We will consider the nature of God as three persons and one, the nature of our eternal destination, and the intercession or mediation between God and men.

DENIAL OF GODHEAD/TRINITY

The word “Trinity” has been created to describe the Biblical viewpoint of the Godhead as being three separate persons, yet one God. Many might point out that the word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible (to which we might respond “neither is the word “Bible”), the word that is used in Scripture is “Godhead”.

Some believe only God the Father is God. They have denied Jesus’ divine nature, stating that he has deistic qualities, but is not God. Others deny that the Holy Spirit is God, stating that He is not a person, but a power or influence of God the Father. Variations of this idea would hold that there is God the Father, God the Son, but not God the Holy Spirit.

Typically, those who believe this doctrine cite passages that speak to the “oneness” of God:

Deuteronomy 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!"

Why it is wrong: When Jesus was on earth, He insisted that he was God. One point He made is that if we did not believe this, we would die on our sins:

John 8:24 "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

God's nature is not one easily discerned or described, but plainly stated. God reveals Himself as a plurality from the beginning:

Genesis 1:26,27 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.....So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them"

God cannot be referring to Himself and the angels (as some suggest), since man is strictly revealed as being made in the image of God.

God is also revealed as a plurality by the use of the name *Elohim*, the most common Hebrew word translated as God, beginning in Genesis 1:1. This word literally means "Gods", a plurality of the One True God. This *Elohim* is the creator of the universe:

Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God <elohiym> created the heaven and the earth"

If this name refers to the Persons of God, (an expression we will use to describe this Godhead, three persons in one) then the world was created through the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is exactly what the Scriptures reveal:

John 1:3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

Hebrews 1:2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.

Psalms 104:30 You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the earth.

In fact, the Bible reveals that the creation was also a work of Jesus Christ and a work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we must conclude that *Elohim* is the name of God in multiple persons.

Also important to note is that God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit all share qualities that are only found in God, divine attributes manifested only by the One True God. There is no disagreement that God the Father is all knowing (omniscient), all powerful (omnipotent), is ever-present (omnipresent), and eternal; these characteristics make Him God, do they not? Not even angels possess these characteristics (I Peter 1:12, Hebrews 1:5-9).

Does the Holy Spirit possess these characteristics? According to Scripture, He is:

- (1) Omniscient – 1 Corinthians 2:10-11
- (2) Omnipresent – Psalms 139:7
- (3) Omnipotent – Psalms 104:30
- (4) Eternal – Hebrews 9:14

Does Jesus Christ possess these same characteristics? According to Scripture, He is:

- (1) Omniscient - John 4:18-19
- (2) Omnipresent - Matthew 28:20
- (3) Omnipotent - Matthew 28:18
- (4) Eternal - I Timothy 1:17

Therefore, we can see that both Jesus and the Holy Spirit possess qualities that are unique to God; they too are God.

Ultimately, the Bible states that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all God. The Father is called God (I Peter 1:3), the Son is called God (John 1:1, 20:28), and the Holy Spirit is called God (John 4:24, 1 Corinthians 3:16-19). Such a concise statement of identity is a deathblow to any who deny that all three are God.

DEITY AND HUMANITY OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

While most accept the idea that Jesus of Nazareth was God, some teach while on earth, Jesus was only a man, and lacked the Divine Nature that was God. Some suggest that Paul's point in Philippians 2:7 ("*He emptied himself*") indicated that He dispossessed Himself of the Divine Nature to become a man. Others suggest Jesus was a created being, and only subsequently became God.

Why it is wrong: There are a number of statements that make it clear this is not the case. Paul said:

Colossians 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;

While on earth, Jesus exercised attributes that are unique to God. For example, Scriptures stated that God knows the hearts of men. While on earth, Jesus exercised this power:

Acts 1:24 And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen"

Matthew 9:4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?"

There is also the point that Jesus was prophetically identified as God before He was born:

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Finally, there is the point that while alive on the earth Jesus was called God by men:

John 20:28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

In the opposite vein, some teach that while on earth, Jesus was not a man. Yet the Bible also makes clear He was a man:

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,

Some teach that Jesus was an angel or created being. The Bible makes clear He was NOT an angel, and is a CREATING being:

Hebrews 1:5-6 For to which of the angels did He ever say: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You"? And again: "I will be to Him a Father; And He shall be to Me a Son"? But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: "Let all the angels of God

worship Him."

John 1:3 All things were made through Him (CHRIST), and without Him nothing was made that was made.

WORSHIP OR ADORATION OF MEN AND ANGELS

There are many people today who believe that there is a possibility of mediation (or intercession) between God and man via a (living or dead) human agent. Of course, some of this applies to the clergy system we will examine later. But some believe that it is possible to direct prayer to or through people deceased in order to be heard of God, Mary is the most obvious victim of this application, but there are those who pray through apostles, or even persons more recent. Also, some believe that angels have the means of intercession, and obsess over the identity and ability of such.

Why it is wrong: Quite simply, Scripture teaches us that ONLY Christ has the power of mediation between God and man. At the same time, Scripture is very clear about the unique ability of the Holy Spirit regarding intercession:

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,

Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Scripture clearly teaches us that we are forbidden to worship or pray to angels. Jesus alone died to be the intercessor (go-between) for man and God, and no angel has the ability to mediate between God and man.

Colossians 2:18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind

Revelation 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not

do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!..."

In the same way, we are forbidden to worship or pray to men, living or deceased. Again, the unique mediation of Christ rules out any other access to God; Jesus made it clear He was the only way to the Father (John 14:6)

Acts 10:25 As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. 26 But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man."

If someone were to pray to a man, a deceased man (sometimes referred to as "Saints", which in Scripture is the designation of any believer) they call for intercession from those who cannot intercede. Their prayers are in vain.

HEAVEN ON EARTH

Many today look for an eternal reign of Christ on earth (pre-millennialism). In variation of this, some hold that the eternal destiny of many righteous men would be on a "new" earthly paradise. To support this, some point to passages which speak of a new heavens and a new earth:

Isaiah 65:17 "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind."

Why it is wrong: Scriptures reveal a rather clear end for the earth. It is not one of paradise, but destruction:

2 Peter 3:9-12 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be

dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

HELL AND ANNIHILATION

There are some who teach that Hell is not a place, but an allegory for the destruction of the human soul at the end of time. Some say that those who are cast away by God are not tormented eternally, but simply cease to exist, and fail to enjoy the blessings of heaven. Typically those who believe this cite no Scriptural reference, but human reasoning, believing that a merciful God would not permit an eternal torment.

Why it is wrong: The Bible makes clear the following about Hell: It is eternal torment.

Mark 9:43-44 "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched-- where 'Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.'

It is a place reserved at the end of time that is eternal.

Revelation 20:10 The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

There are other statements of the like in Scriptures, both in the Old and New Testament. We must consider that a merciful God has done what He can do to prevent our eternal destruction by the ultimate offering, the death of His Son.

PURGATORY

During the 12th century an idea took root among (Catholic) theologians that there was an “in-between” event or place that dealt with the sins of men who had joined the covenant of God. Meaning, if you were a Christian, but not a “good” Christian, you might not go straight to heaven, but suffer for a while to purge out or punish some disqualification. Some say that Paul’s admonition to the Corinthians suggested such a purging of sin after death:

1 Corinthians 3:13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

Even though the passage mentioned no place, nor did it suggest a post–death event, the application of the idea was likely a means to provide a “second chance” to those who knew what was right, but did not walk accordingly. The idea was not exclusive to the Catholic church, but also taught within the Anglican church, and might be similar to the Protestant doctrine of the Seven Year Tribulation.

Why is it wrong: Purgatory is derailed when exposed to the light of Scripture. When we die, there is only death and judgment (Hebrews 9:27). At that judgment our destiny is determined eternally (Revelation 20: 10, 21:8). Scripture is clear that if we have repented and confessed our sins, we are *entirely* forgiven; there is no partial or limited cleansing:

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We are destined to die once, and then to be judged. At our judgment we receive either our eternal reward (if we are in Christ) or our eternal punishment. There is no middle judgment.

THE ETERNAL GOD

One denomination in particular (The Mormon Church) teaches that God is not an eternal being. Part of their doctrine is summarized in this statement: “As we are, He once was. As He is, we will become”⁴

Why it is wrong: Scripture is clear that God is an eternal being. It does not in any location suggest God was ever a mortal being, but instead was God before time began:

Deuteronomy 33:27 The eternal God is your refuge,

1 Timothy 1:17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Hebrews 9:14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit

⁴ Mormon Doctrine, Pg 237, Apostle Bruce McConkie

Chapter 3: The Nature of Revelation

When we speak about *revelation*, we are talking about the way God has revealed Himself to mankind. Specifically, we mean the Bible, the inspired Word of God. Inspired means “*spirit infused*”, and refers to the Spirit of God being manifested in the Word of God. The writers of the Bible taught that the Bible was not their words, but the words of the Holy Spirit:

II Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:20-21 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Today many people who claim to be spiritual do not believe the inspiration of the Bible. This might be expressed in doubting that the Bible is complete, or that it is inspired at all. Consider that in 2006, the Barna Group (a research group) reported that only 48% of all adults who identified themselves as Christian agreed strongly that the Bible is totally accurate in all of its teachings.⁵

We live in a world where we are told the Bible is a fable and myth. Schools now present this as their worldview. Academic institutions reject outright the possibility that there is a God and Creator of all things. Historians reject the world origins that the Bible presents.

It is surprising for many to find out that a large number of denominations make reference to the Bible as not being a reliable means to find the revelation of God. Some would suggest that their additional creeds, doctrines or writings are necessary to give us the mind of God.

GOD’S REVELATION IS FLAWED

There are a number of claims that the Bible has errors or flaws or contradictions. Those who would find fault with the message of the Scriptures turn to the idea of Revelation itself, and claim that “mistakes”

⁵ The State of the Church: 2006, Barna Institute for Research

in the Bible are evidence of the absence of Divine origin. Others claim that the Bible has been too numerously translated and copied, and so we are unable to have a reasonable confidence in the accuracy of the Scriptures

Why is it wrong: God promised that His word would abide forever, and that it would guide us into His truth. To believe otherwise is to doubt the very existence of God:

1 Peter 1:24-25 because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, But the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

When we review works that cast doubt on the accuracy of the Bible (examples include the Skeptics Annotated Bible or Misquoting Jesus by Bart Erhman) we find that almost all “mistakes” are misunderstandings, either intentional or simply due to a lack of desire to accept the truth. For example, is Jesus God or Man? A skeptic would point to this as a “contradiction”, but (as we saw previously) the Christian holds both true. Did an angel appear inside of Jesus’ tomb (Mark 16:5) or outside the tomb (Matthew 28:2)? We of course say both are true, and do not exclude each other. Are we to worship in a tabernacle, or are we the tabernacle? The believer sees the change in law not as contradictory, but as validation of Scripture.

Certainly there are a few translational errors, either because of archaic words (the “unicorns” in the King James Version of Psalm 22:21 are a mistranslation of the word for wild oxen) or the willful intent of the translators to do violence to the text of the Bible (the “sinful nature” inserted by the translators of the New International Version of Romans 8:3 instead of the “sinful flesh” it actually states). However, we have both the means and the resources to rectify such errors.

When some say that the Bible has been copied and translated too often to be reliable, it really reveals ignorance on the historical translation process of the Bible. The English Bible is only ONE translation from the original text (Greek to English), and our oldest copies of the original manuscripts (such as the Syriatic or Vatican manuscripts of the Bible) are likely just a few copies from the originals. We have manuscript pieces that date to within a generation of the original writers.

Finally, we of faith believe the promises of God. God has said His word will not depart from us (1 Peter 1:25, Isaiah 40:8). If God is real, to suggest He lacks the ability to preserve His message renders Him an impotent God. How could we trust a God to redeem us from the grave (miraculously) who could not even (providentially) preserve 2,000 year old writings?

GOD'S REVELATION CANNOT BE UNDERSTOOD

Some who agree that the Bible is not flawed still attack the integrity of Scripture to say that it cannot be understood. Such language is made with the following explanations: it cannot be understood by a common person, or it cannot be understood without a pre-received infusion of the Holy Spirit. Such a statement is the treasure of the false teacher, who can use such to invalidate the Scriptural attack on their doctrines. Therefore, it is a very common doctrine taught by a number of persons today.

Those who suggest such might point to the following passages as "proof text":

1 Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

2 Peter 3:15-16 and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

Why it is wrong: This is not what the authors were telling us. Peter clearly states that Paul's writings can be difficult (which is not to say impossible) to understand, and Paul is stating that ungodly men refuse to hear God's truth. There is nothing here to suggest Scripture cannot be understood.

To the contrary, the Bible claims it can be understood; many times it is stated that Scripture can be understood just by reading it:

Ephesians 3:3-4 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),

2 Corinthians 1:13 "For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end"

Jesus' enemies could read and understand, thus indicating that even with a hard heart Scripture can be understood:

Luke 10:26-28 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind," and 'your neighbor as yourself.'" And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."

Even youth can understand:

2 Timothy 3:15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

As we stated earlier, Scripture can be understood, but it may be that some things are more difficult than others. Paul admonished Timothy to be diligent in the study of scriptures (II Timothy 2:15), a suggestion that infers that even men whom hands had been laid upon (I Timothy 4:14) needed to work at understanding Scriptures. The Ethiopian eunuch needed someone to study with in order to fully understand (Acts 8:31).

To be clear, let us see what is not stated, that is, what we do not need to understand Scripture. We do not need a church (the Ethiopian eunuch and the Bereans understood without a church); we do not need the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, since even the unsaved can understand. Finally, we do not need a creed to understand Scriptures.

GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF IN OTHER WAYS

Some may agree that the Bible is accurate, and that it can be understood. But they are still fundamentally flawed in the belief that there are additional ways that God reveals himself today. We can divide these into four areas: Traditions, Other Writings, Creeds, and Direct Revelations.

Why it is wrong: the Hebrew writer speaks to the singular way of God's revelation today in Hebrews 1:1-2:

Hebrews 1:1-2 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

God speaks but one way today, and this is through His Word.

TRADITION

Some denominations teach that there is an oral law with a written one. The Bible does speak about traditions, but these are the revelations of the apostles and prophets by inspiration, which today is Scripture

2 Thessalonians 2:15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.

Why it is wrong: The apostles commanded that their teachings be written (II Timothy 2:2 with 3:14-17). Therefore, the only oral traditions mentioned in the NT are those of Christ and the Apostles, of which are either (1) lost or (2) scripture. We have all the revelation intended from God.

In the Greek Orthodox and Catholic churches, traditions are called the *Sacred and Holy Traditions*, and they teach that such can be passed through living persons. It is constantly re-written in Catechism, or teachings of the church.

Let us say something very clear: Jesus HATED traditions, and never quoted from them in a positive light. Instead, Jesus constantly referred to what was written in order to establish Himself. When we review the New Testament, Jesus made over 100 appeals to Scriptures, and NONE to traditions:

Matthew 15:3-9 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God" -- 'then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

OTHER TEXTS

There are a number of denominations that make use of other texts they hold to be inspired. The

Mormon church holds that the Book of Mormon (translated by Joseph Smith in the early 19th century) is “another Gospel of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:9), one which is necessarily superior to the Bible by age and translation. The Methodist Discipline (particularly to specific denominations of Methodism) claims to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Roman Catholic church holds the Apocrypha to have some limited inspiration. The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (the leadership of the Jehovah’s Witnesses) claims to be inspired by God.

Why it is wrong: Scripture states clearly that it is sufficient of itself alone to be the revelation of God. Paul told Timothy that Scripture was entirely sufficient for every Good work; Jude told his audience that God had made His will known once for all; John told his audience not to add to God’s word:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Jude 1:3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

Revelation 22:18 For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; 19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

The Scriptures that were written 2000 years ago are completely sufficient for our needs. Our faith has been delivered once and for all. To add to this message is to be condemned by God.

CREEDS

A *creed* is a statement or confession of belief — usually religious belief — or faith, often recited as part of a religious service. The word derives from the Latin: *credo* for “I believe” and *credimus* for “we believe”. Practically ALL denominations have creeds or Statements/Confessions of Faith. They are used to create unity in doctrine that is separate from Scripture. The very basis of denominationalism is the need for

uniformity apart from scripture.

Two of the most common creeds are the *Apostles Creed* and the *Nicean Creed*. Between these two creeds most denominations hold orthodoxy.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

Why it is wrong: The great and terrible danger of the creed is not that it states a false doctrine; many creeds are taken from the Scriptures. Instead, the danger is found in the exclusionary nature of a creed. By limiting what is “important”, it excludes a great amount of the Word of God. The creed is a false means to unity.

DIRECT REVELATION

Many people who state that they believe in “*Sola Scriptura*,” or the Bible only, fail to realize that they also believe in direct revelations from God. Such things as visions and messages, feelings, or mystical appearances would fall into this category of revelation.

When John Wesley (founder of the Methodist Church) attended a prayer meeting in the late 18th century, he was overcome with a feeling of warmth, which he attributed to God imparting to him some message⁶. Such is a direct revelation from God. When Billy Graham recounts his conversion experience, he states that “Immediately joy, peace and assurance flooded my soul.”⁷ Such feeling is not from Scripture, but instead suggests that he had a direct revelation from God.

⁶ 1.Egermeier, Elsie E. *John Wesley, the Christian hero*. Anderson, Indiana: Gospel Trumpet, 1923

⁷ <http://www.billygraham.org/articlepage.asp?ArticleID=1575>

Most religious people will describe some experience, feeling or image that has come to them from God. It may be something pronounced, such as a voice, a vision or a quaking of the body. It also might be described as subtle, as a sense of calm, peace or closeness to God.

Why it is wrong: Scripture makes the claim that it alone is the means in which God communicates to man. Such exclusivity rules out experiences, whether great or small:

II Peter 1:3 "seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him

Many people crave a personal experience of salvation or enlightenment, and in doing so reject the truth of God. God speaks through His word, and all other messages are not from Him:

I Corinthians 4:6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.

In closing, let us consider that God did not promise that there would be further revelations to come from Him, but that there would be false revelations from men. Even “feelings” can be described as such a type of false revelation:

I Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

Chapter 4: The Nature of Salvation

How is a man saved by God? This may be the most important area of study when it comes to false doctrines. Are we saved by something we do to earn our eternal reward (works)? Is it the case that there is nothing we do to be saved (faith only)? We will use this chapter to examine a number of false doctrines that relate to the way that a person is eternally saved.

SALVATION BY WORKS ONLY

Salvation by works only is the idea that there is some action that, absent of faith, can meet the conditions or even merit salvation. We find this idea among denominations that practice such things as infant baptism, confirmation, or penance.

In the New Testament, this doctrine prevailed among the teachers who desired for the Gentile Christians to practice parts of the law of Moses. Much of Paul's writing in Romans and Galatians is against these ideas:

Galatians. 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Paul's battle over works was not works in general, but the idea that one could be saved by the works of the Old Law. This means:

- (1) Necessity of circumcision
- (2) Necessity of the laws of purity
- (3) Necessity of the observance of days

Today almost no denomination would admit to practicing a doctrine of salvation by works. Yet it is found among any who believe that something can be done by one person for another, regardless of the will

of the person involved. Consider the baptism of infants (Mark 16:16), who some believe are saved when baptized absent of belief. Consider baptism for the dead (Hebrews 9:27), who some believe are saved when baptized absent of knowledge (Ecclesiastes 9:5). Another variation is the idea of penance (Colossians 2:13), in which someone is saved after some task or act of contrition (Acts 8:22).

Why it is wrong: God has always demanded that our heart and actions be synonymous.

Deuteronomy 10:12 "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

Matthew 15:8 "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me."

We are told repeatedly that we must not only have the right actions, but the right heart. We are told too that we cannot merit or earn salvation.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

The conclusion is that salvation cannot come by works alone.

SALVATION BY FAITH ONLY

Salvation by faith only can be summed up to say that a man is saved without any condition necessary or action taken on his part. As we stated earlier, it was a natural conclusion to the doctrine that man is so corrupt in his nature (*Original Sin*) that God must directly operate on a man's mind or soul so that the same man will be able to "find" God. It is the "U" in TULIP theology (*unconditional election*) that was created by John Calvin, and was most preached by the most prominent of Protestant reformers, Martin Luther. Sometimes it is referred to as *salvation by Grace only*. Those who teach it believe the "works" Paul mentions in Galatians, Ephesians or Romans are in fact any and all works, not just the works of the Law of Moses. The idea requires the interpretation of the "free gift" of Grace as meaning there is no action on our part. In the minds of many, "Free" means "unconditional". Here are some "proof" texts cited:

Romans 5:15-16 But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many

died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

Simply stated, people who believe in “faith only” believe there is nothing you can do to be saved. If that is the case, there is nothing you can then do to be lost.

While there might possibly be some appeal at first glance (“easy believe-ism”), the consequences of this doctrine are horrible. First, necessarily, God would be a respecter of persons, since salvation is for only a few lucky enough to be picked. That then leads us to see that faith would not come by the Word of God (which Paul tells us in Romans 10:17), but by direct action from God, since everyone has the Word of God. God chooses whom he elects without qualification (predestination).

Why it is wrong: The Bible firmly rejects the idea of salvation by faith/grace only. If this doctrine is so key and cornerstone to salvation, why is it never expressed in the entirety of Scripture? Furthermore, why is it that THE ONLY statement in Scriptures of “Faith only” is:

James 2:24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

To be clear, by “Faith Only” James means Faith is defined by both belief and action. Faith is demonstrated by our obedient actions, as the 11th chapter of Hebrews teaches us. Jesus Himself tells us Faith is itself a work!

John 6:28-29 Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

The Bible is full of statements that make it undeniable that salvation is conditional and incumbent on our actions:

Acts 2:40 And with many other words did (Peter) testify and exhort, saying, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation."

Acts 2:37 (the crowd) said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

Acts 16:30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said,

Philippians. 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

What about the *Free Gift of God*? “Free” is not in the original language, but has been added, although it is appropriate to the text or context. Everywhere else that free is used, it pertains to our freedom from sin. Let us consider that other “free” gifts had requirements; miraculous gifts were only for Christians:

1 Corinthians. 12:9 To another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit.

Salvation is certainly free and unmerited, but it is not unconditional.

ETERNAL SECURITY/ ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED

Eternal Security is a false doctrine that flows naturally from the idea that salvation is by believing only; those who believe such conclude that if there is nothing that can be done to receive salvation, there is nothing that can be done to lose salvation. This idea is what we commonly call “once saved always saved”, but is referred to as the “Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints” or the “Doctrine of Eternal Security”. This is the “P” in TULIP theology.

The scriptural argument presented in defense of this doctrine points to a few statements made by Jesus in the Gospel of John:

John 6:39 "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.

John 10:28-29 "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."

Why it is wrong: Jesus was not saying that “none can be” lost after being saved; He saying that Satan has no authority over one who is in Christ. Otherwise, this would contradict a subsequent statement where Jesus said that one would be lost:

John 17:12 "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled."

We are meant to see it in the light of this statement:

2 Timothy 2:12-13 If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.

Is it possible that once we are saved, we are saved forever, no matter what we do? No doctrine can be more easily seen to be false. In EVERY BOOK OF THE NEW TESTAMENT (except Philemon) there is a warning given to the believer that they can fall from a saved condition. Consider *only some* of these admonitions:

Matthew 5:13	Salt (saved) can lose its flavor and be thrown out
Mark 13:13	One must endure to the end to be saved
Luke 8:13	The saved can fall away
John 15:2	Those in Christ can be cast out
Acts 8:13	Simon believed and was baptized, then lost his portion
Romans 13:2	The saved can bring damnation on themselves
I Corinthians 10:12	Christians can fall

II Corinthians 13:5	Any Christian can become disqualified
Galatians 5:4	These Christians had already fallen from Grace
Ephesians 5:6-7	Christians can be deceived and become partakers of wrath
Philippians 2:12	Salvation requires constant work
Colossians 3:5	Christians can sin the same as those who receive wrath
1Thessalonians 3:5	By temptation the Thessalonians may be lost
2Thessalonians 2:3	The apostasy (falling away) is coming
1 Timothy 4:1	Some WILL depart from the faith
2 Timothy 2:17	Christians can stray concerning the truth
Titus 1:14	Christians can deny the faith
James 5:19	A Christian who sins unto death can return from death
1 Peter 4:17	The house of God will also be judged
2 Peter 2:20 -22	A Christian can turn from God and be condemned
1 John 5:16	A Christian can sin unto death
2 John 1:9	A Christian can fail to abide in the doctrine of Christ
3 John 9-11	Diotrophes is no longer known by God
Jude 5	God destroyed those whom he saved when they did not believe
Revelation 22:19	A Christian can have their name removed from the Book of Life

In the book of Hebrews alone there are *seven* such admonitions

Hebrews 2:1-2	We can drift away by neglecting salvation
Hebrews 3:12	An evil heart of disbelief can depart from God
Hebrews 3:18-19	A Christian can be denied access to heaven
Hebrews 4:1	A Christian can come short of salvation
Hebrews 6:4 -6	A Christian can fall away
Hebrews 10:26-29	A Christian can willfully sin and have no salvation
Hebrews 12:15	A Christian can fall short of Grace

As we see, it is clear from Scripture that the doctrine of eternal security is contrary to the truth of God.

SAVED BY PRAYER

Saved by prayer is most commonly called the “**Sinner’s Prayer**”, and is the idea that an alien sinner can pray a specific prayer, and be forgiven by God. In the 1930s, revivals in the United States were on the rise. However, there was no means to measure the impact that such events had on the lives of the listeners. Many saw a need for some visible means to confirm someone had been saved by their faith alone. The idea came about that one could say a “Sinner’s Prayer” as a necessary confession of faith. The idea of a salvation with prayer had been around since the 18th century, but was widely considered a mockery of a true confession. Yet in 20th century America, this mockery became the most common means among Protestants to experience salvation. Many turned to one particular statement:

Romans 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Why it is wrong: This theory has one major, unavoidable stumbling block. God does not hear the prayers of those who are in sin.

John 9:31 "Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him."

Isaiah 59:1-2 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.

1 Peter 3:7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

God has made it clear that one must first be in a right relationship with Him before He will hear their prayers. It is Christ who mediates, and so one must be “in Christ” to be heard of God (Galatians 3:26-28). One who is an alien sinner must first repent and confess their faith, and then be baptized into Christ, to have a mediator for prayer to be heard.

PREDESTINATION

The doctrine of Predestination teaches that long before God made man, He chose who would be saved and who would perish eternally. Therefore, there is nothing we can do to change our personal destiny. Predestination is another doctrine born naturally from the idea of Original Sin. If we cannot come to a saving knowledge of God without His direct help, and since all men are not saved, the only reasonable conclusion is that God pre-selects whom He will save.

“God has Predestined and foreordained that some men and angels out of His free Grace and Love without any foresight to faith or works in man or perseverance in either of them, and others are foreordained to everlasting death, and the number of either of them is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished” – Westminster Confession of Faith

In TULIP theology, this is” *limited atonement for the elect*”. It teaches that God's atonement is limited only to those who are elect, which occurred before time began.

Why it is wrong: The fatal flaw of predestination is the simple truth of God’s desire that all men be

saved.

Mark 16:15-16 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Such a doctrine is a slander against the virtue of God, who has declared He is not partial.

1 Peter 1:17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;

Roman 2:11 For there is no partiality with God.

In Scripture, there is an image of predestination that complies with the above passages. It describes a predetermined form or image in which men would be saved, which is the image of Christ. As Paul described baptism as the act of putting on Christ, one who is in Christ is in that predestined image of salvation.

Romans 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Ephesians 1:5,11 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will..... In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,

Chapter 5: The Nature of Judgment

The Bible tells us in Hebrews 6:1-3 that judgment is a fundamental teaching of Christianity. One day all men will be raised by God and judged for their deeds. Yet there are a number of ideas that place qualifications, exemptions or addendums to this truth, and thus become false doctrine.

Many of the issues that are around today pertaining to judgment are not so much doctrine as they are personal feeling. Most people hold a rather inconsistent view of what is “good”, and what God will see in them on the day of Judgment. While this is a doctrine not embraced wholly by many denominations, it is an idea that is embraced in a practical sense by most religious persons. Pertaining to judgment, there are only a few true doctrines to be examined.

UNIVERSALISM

Universalism could be generalized as simply the doctrine that states that all men are going to heaven. Also called universal salvation, it has gained ground in the more liberal denominations, and is likely the direction that the Catholic church and the Orthodox churches are headed. Consider these recent events:

*April 7, 2008, Russian Orthodox Bishop Hilarion of Vienna in his presentation at the First World Apostolic Congress of Divine Mercy, argued that God's mercy is so great that He does not condemn sinners to everlasting punishment.*⁸

Not only the Orthodox church, but the Catholic church has moved this way, stating in the Catechism that both Muslims and Jews have the hope of salvation:

Catechism 841" The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day

The appeal of Universalism is obvious; no matter how you live, God’s salvation will redeem you. Thus the love that God had for the whole world required no response from men.

⁸ <http://www.catholicculture.org/news/features/index.cfm?recnum=57674>

Why it is wrong: anyone remotely acquainted with the Bible sees the immediate error of the ideology. God has from the beginning of time established His love as conditional:

Exodus 34:6-7 And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

The reality of Hell has been discussed previously; the absolute nature of that judgment in Scripture cannot be ignored.

John 5:28-29 "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD

The apostle Paul made an unusual statement in I Corinthians when he said the following:

1 Corinthians 15:29 Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?

There is at least one denomination (the Mormon church) which practices an act of baptism for persons deceased. This baptism believed sufficient for that deceased person to be eternally rewarded. There are others who hold that certain ceremonies, offerings or prayers for the dead might change their eternal condition, or speed along their time in purgatory.

Why it is wrong: Baptism for the dead, or any idea that allows the living to act for the dead, allows one person to act for the salvation of another, which we previous pointed out establishes a salvation purely on works. The context of the passage relates to our actions in this life being with a mind to the next one; Paul's point would contextually be one which asked "why do we do something now for a reward later"?

To understand what Paul meant we must determine the identity of the dead. In Romans 6, Paul made it clear that we were once dead in sin, and baptism was a burial into the death of Christ:

Romans 6:2-7 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.

Thus we who are baptized are the dead (in sin), and we are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ, to have a new birth in Him.

Chapter 6: The Nature of the World

The world we live in is a creation of God (Genesis 1:1). The natural question we have is often to the manner in which God acts in this world today. In this chapter we consider whether God still works in miracles, whether the devil still acts through possession, or the manner in which God created this universe.

MIRACLES TODAY

The word miracle is a rather misused noun in our language today. Often people speak of the “miracle” of life, or the miracle of someone’s return to good health, when they actually mean “marvel” or “unlikely”. In fact, a miracle has a very limited definition, as it is an event (with a divine origin) that violates the laws of nature.

Today some denominations have a clear doctrine that accepts miracles in the modern age. Beyond that, many more members of denominations have a confessed belief in modern miracles, even if their denomination does not have an official doctrinal standpoint. Whether it is speaking in tongues, healings, or day to day events, it is a belief that covers most all denominations and stretches to most people. Is it a position that is a doctrine of Christ?

Why it is wrong: when we consider miracles in a spiritual setting, we find that they were performed for the purpose of confirmation of faith rather than the creation of faith.

John 20:30-31 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

The second point that we must see about miracles is that the purpose of the miracle was to demonstrate the authority of the person. It would be a true general statement to say that no revelation was made from God unless it was accompanied with a miracle. Consider Jesus’ point here:

Matthew 9:5-6 "For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" --then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

We also need to take a moment to define the idea of providence. Providence is the term we use to describe an even (with a divine origin that DOES NOT, no matter how extraordinary, violate the laws of nature. To illustrate the point, let us examine the manner in which Jesus pays the temple tax in Matthew 17:

Matthew 17:27 "Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you."

This event is extraordinary. Does it violate a law of nature? We know fish swallow things all the time. People catch fish all the time. What happened here are events which, standing alone, are unremarkable. However, when these events are placed in an order one after another, as the context states, they become remarkable. Still, these events are not miraculous; this demonstrates divine providence at work. Had the fish transformed into a coin, we would see something that was not part of the natural order, and thus a miracle by definition.

When we pray today, we are seeking providential answers, not miraculous answers. When we pray for healing (James 5:14), we seek providence, not miracles. Can we see that God's providence is equally providing as miracles? Can we see that faith is more mature to seek providence rather than miracles? Spiritual people understand providence is the answer to our prayers, fully providing us our needs.

2 Corinthians 9:12-13 For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men,

There are five reasons why there CANNOT be miracles today.

First, we must consider that miracles are unnecessary. Miracles came to provide authority for a message; as we have already seen, the message of God is complete. Therefore, the advent of miracles is unnecessary, since everything it was needed for (authority) has been accomplished.

Jude 1:3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

Second, when we examine the purpose of miracles, we should also conclude that we cannot have them. To seek miracles in this age is to seek out a new revelation or covenant. Yet we are told such is not the case.

Third, we were told in the New Testament that miracles were not meant to remain. Peter said it would last until the “Day of the Lord”, which was (according to Matthew 24) AD70.

Acts 2:16-20 "But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams..... I will show wonders in heaven above And signs in the earth beneath: Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.'"

In the same vein, Paul said miracles would end when the revelation was complete:

1 Corinthians 13:8-10 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

Fourth, not only were we told this, it was demonstrated to us as well. We found in the New Testament that the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit could not be passed on except by an Apostle:

Acts 8:14-17 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Acts 19:5-6 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

The apostolic qualifications were quite clear (Acts 1:21-22). No one today could meet those

qualifications; therefore, it is impossible that these gifts could remain.

Finally, the most obvious point is that we simply do not see any miracles. When people claim to have witnessed miracles, they have likely either been deceived (Revelation 19:20), or are unaware of the supernatural nature of miracles. When Lazarus came from the grave, there were many witnesses. When the lame man walked in Acts 3, everyone saw and knew it had happened, whether they believed in Jesus Christ or not. Faith was irrelevant for someone to be to be witnesses of the miracle.

In truth, the modern belief in miracles is quite a deadly doctrine of demons. It denies the power of the word of God, by insisting on seeing to believe (John 20:29). It also causes people to seek after charlatans to be deceived. Finally, at the heart of the desire for miracles is a desire for God to particularly bless us above others; it causes people to esteem themselves or others beyond what is right.

DEMONIC POSSESSION

Like miracles, there are some denominations that have a doctrinal belief in demonic possession. Even more often it is the case that a religious person believes in demonic possession while the denomination they are a part of does not have an official position on demonic possession. In either case, they would hold that demons can take control of persons on the earth, and that only certain people would then have the power to “cast them out”.

Why it is wrong: Unique to the New Testament is the event that we refer to as demonic possession. It was acknowledged in the New Testament that such was the case:

Matthew 9:33 And when the demon was cast out, the mute spoke. And the multitudes marveled, saying, "It was never seen like this in Israel!"

Jesus told us that the purpose of permitting demonic possession was two-fold. First, it was His work to bind the power of Satan and the power of demons with His death and resurrection. Second, it was for Him to demonstrate that He worked the power of God.

Revelation 20:2 He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;

Jude 1:6 And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day;

Matthew 12:22-28 Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

We can get a clear picture from these passages that demonic possessions, like miraculous signs, were meant to demonstrate the authority of Christ, which is no longer necessary in this age.

Finally, consider that Satan's best tool is subterfuge. His work is best accomplished by covert actions. Why would he change a plan that works so well:

2 Corinthians 11:14-15 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

THEISTIC EVOLUTION

There are a number of worldly inroads made into spiritual thought today. Post-modernism, humanism and the like have ravaged the mind of many believers and pseudo-believers. However, as a doctrine, really only one humanistic idea has been introduced as a doctrinal idea, the doctrine of theistic evolution.

The account of the creation of the world is found in Genesis 1-2. There we are told that in six days God formed all creation. We are told that since that time, life has continued on (Psalm 119:90-91), each form of life reproducing its own kind (Genesis 1:24).

However, since the 19th century, the theory of evolution has offered an alternative to the Biblical account, which has in the last 40 years become the "standard" of the carnal-minded men of knowledge. Evolution itself is a rather generic term which could be stated broadly as the idea that change occurs over

time. The “Accepted Theory of Evolution” states that all life came from a single cell, which came from non-living matter; all non-living material came from “other things”; all energy came from a singular event (currently, the “big bang”); the age of the earth is 5 billion years, and mankind has been around for 5 million years.

It is no surprise that as the worldly mind accepted this, it became a doctrine of many religious-minded persons. The Doctrine of Theistic Evolution generally states that God used evolution to manufacture the creation. It then states that either Genesis is a parable or the “days” of Gen 1 are not true days, but “ages”. The movement of life would then correspond to current evolutionary theory.

The Catholic church has stated both from the Papal See and in the catechism⁹ that “evolution is compatible with Christian faith”.¹⁰ The Methodist Discipline states “We find that science’s descriptions of cosmological, geological, and biological evolution are not in conflict with theology”¹¹. On February 12, 2007 (Charles Darwin’s birthday), a number of protestant denominations participated in “Evolution Sunday”¹², which proclaimed the acceptance of theistic evolution.

Why it is wrong: the issue here is the acceptance of worldly wisdom over divine. A reconciliation of Genesis with evolution is illogical and ignorant of scripture. First, the language of Genesis does not lend itself to parable format. The “days” of Genesis are clearly defined with a non-literal method.

Genesis 1:5 God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.

Second, it is clear that God’s inspired people believed it was a factual truth. For example, Moses based the law of the Sabbath on a literal six days of creation and a seventh day of rest:

Exodus 20:11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

⁹ God himself created the visible world in all its richness, diversity, and order. Scripture presents the work of the Creator symbolically as a succession of six days of divine ‘work,’ concluded by the ‘rest’ of the seventh day. - 337

¹⁰ <http://www.newscientist.com/blogs/shortsharpscience/2009/02/vatican-backs-darwin-dumps-cre.html>

¹¹ [The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church](#), section 160f, 2008

¹²http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/content/news_syndication/article_060220creationism.shtml

Jesus based our laws of marriage on the creation of Adam and Eve:

Matthew 19:4-5 And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?"

Jesus believed the creation of man and woman was in the beginning:

Mark 10:6 "But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.'"

Paul believed in the literal account of creation; he taught that Adam was the first man in Acts 17:26, and he taught that Eve was taken from man in I Corinthians 11:8-9. The Hebrew writer said it was a matter of Faith to believe in the creation:

Hebrews 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

The greatest problem with this doctrine is the underlying mindset as to why it even exists. People believe because they esteem what men (learned men of our age) have said over what the Bible says. In believing an idea such as “theistic evolution”, we esteem the creation above the creator:

Romans 1:20-23 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

Chapter 7: The Nature of the Kingdom

When the Gospel was preached, the fundamental message was that the Kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1:15, etc). The word kingdom literally refers to a reign or power of a king. While many understand that Jesus was given that authority when He arose from the grave (Matthew 28:18), there are a number of false doctrines that abound about what the kingdom is not. The purpose and intent of this chapter is to keep to a limited examination of the prophetic kingdom, and to prepare an answer from Scripture for those who might ask our belief.

PRE-MILLENNIALISM

Millennium is a term used to encompass the event John describes in Revelation 20:

Revelation 20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

This thousand year period (millennium) is mentioned six times in Revelation 20, but nowhere else in Scripture. As well, the millennium of Revelation 20 is tied to a number of events. It begins with the binding of Satan. It is described as the reigning of Christ and His saints. It concludes with the ultimate judgment.

The book of Revelation contains a number of symbolic passages which are themselves the sources of countless false doctrines, accepted to varying degrees by many people. These doctrines, including the rapture, the antichrist, and the tribulation, will be dealt with as independent portions to the doctrine of pre-millennialism.

Pre-millennialism could be summed up as the belief that Jesus Christ, upon His future and certain return, would establish a kingdom on earth, and reign with His saints. Often, terms such as “end times” or “last days” are liberally applied these doctrines, and proof texts cited include in addition to Revelation, Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21.

Why it is wrong: the kingdom that is mentioned in prophecy and New Testament teaching was established when Jesus arose from the grave. If anyone were to accept the doctrine that the kingdom has not yet come, their conclusion would either be that the doctrine was false or the Old Testament prophets, the apostles, and even Jesus Himself were false prophets.

Starting in the Old Testament, the prophets spoke of the kingdom of Christ as an event at a specific time. Daniel saw this kingdom being established in the days of the Roman Empire, the fourth kingdom after Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon (counting first Babylon, second Persia/Medea, third the Greeks, and fourth Rome):

Daniel 2:44 "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."

Other prophets spoke of this coming kingdom:

Isaiah 2:1-4 The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the LORD'S house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.

These prophecies promised a kingdom that spanned the world, that was the source of understanding, and that heralded peace.

Since the timeframe of these promises clearly pointed to the coming of Jesus Christ in the first century AD, the question becomes, did Jesus establish the kingdom? For many, the answer is "no", because they are minded towards a kingdom that was physical and literal. But what did Jesus say?

John 18:33-36 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this,

or did others tell you this concerning Me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

Jesus spoke to the spiritual nature of the kingdom many times:

Luke 17:20-21 Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."

These passages and others teach us that the kingdom was not physical, but spiritual. But many still reject the prophetic fulfillment of a kingdom because they do not see the established promises of a kingdom met. Yet if we examine Scriptures, we find that the mountain has been set, and the Jerusalem is a spiritual one:

Hebrews 12:22-23 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

We can look and find that the great peace has been established, a peace between the nations of men in Christ, and with the greatest enemy a sinful man could have, which is God Himself:

Ephesians 2:14-16 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

Romans 5:10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

So we see that the prophetic promises were kept in Christ. This leads us to ask, "what is the

kingdom”? The word we translate as “kingdom” (in Greek, *Basileia*) is more rightly understood as an authority or rule, rather than a place. Thus, Jesus proclaims He had received the kingdom when He emerged from the grave and said:

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

But what of John’s Revelation, particularly chapter 20? It is not of great difficulty, if we again approach the Bible as students and not masters. John tells us seven times that the text of Revelation was of immediate occurrence, not one in the far future:

1. “Must soon take place” (1:1)
2. “The time is near” (1:3)
3. “Things which must shortly take place” (22:6)
4. “I am coming quickly” (22:7)
5. “The time is at hand” (22:10)
6. “I am coming quickly” (22:12)
7. “I am coming quickly” (22:20)

We cannot mistake the immediacy of this prophetic vision, and to apply a long term application is to commit a textual violence to the clear theme.

In addition to the many Old and New Testament references to the kingdom having come, if we examine the 20th chapter independently we could find clues to the events that again place us in a historical context, not a future one.

In Revelation 20 John said that the millennium began with the binding of Satan (vs 1). We can find this event mentioned in the Gospels as an event that occurred with Jesus’ death and resurrection:

John 12:31 "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.

Matthew 12:28-29 "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.

John said that the millennium is characterized by the saints reigning with Christ. John and others described this reigning as an event all believers partake of when walking in the doctrine of Christ:

Revelation 1:5-6 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Colossians 3:15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Scripture gives us an understanding of these passages, teaching us that this kingdom of prophecy was manifested in the authority of Christ, and in the church of Christ. We can see that the millennium is the period of this new covenant of Christ.

What about the time period itself? We are told that a day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day (II Peter 3:8, Psalm 90:4). This statement, with the understanding that the millennium represents the church age, confirms for us that this is not a literal 1,000 year period, but the symbolic time in which the authority of Jesus is on earth as it is in heaven.

PRE-MILLENNIALISM: RAPTURE

There are a number of different approaches, or corollaries, that pre-millennialism takes to Scripture. In the 19th century, a Bible Commentator named John Darby invented the idea of a “rapture” of souls to occur prior to the events of Revelation. Again, this pre-supposes that Revelation was not, as John said, an event of first century occurrence, but an event still in our future. Darby took the word *rapture* out of the Latin word for “caught up” that is found in I Thessalonians 4:

1 Thessalonians 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Darby based this idea on his interpretation of the events spoken of in Matthew 24, in which Jesus described the following:

Matthew 24:40-42 "Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming"

Why is it wrong: Matthew 24 pertains not to future events, but to events that Jesus said would occur in the lifetime of the hearers. Jesus clearly said as much:

Matthew 24:34 "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

When we examine the context of the passage, we find that Jesus had been asked about the destruction of the temple (referred to in Luke 21:22 as the *Days of Vengeance*), and was answering in kind:

Luke 21:5-7 Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said, "These things which you see--the days will come in which not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down." So they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, but when will these things be? And what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?"

In Matthew 24:14 Jesus said that the gospel would be preached to the world. According to the apostles, this occurred before 70AD, the historical date of the destruction of the temple:

Romans 1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

Colossians 1:6 which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth;

Colossians 1:23 if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

If the Rapture were an event found in Scripture, it would pose a great problem; it would create multiple judgments for the righteous as well as the unrighteous. The Scriptures reveal one day of judgment for both the righteous and the unrighteous:

Matthew 25:31-32 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.

Another point is that all of the passages which refer to the final return of Jesus Christ describe it as an event that none in the world would miss:

1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

1 Corinthians 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Revelation 1:7 Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.

The rapture is built on Jesus taking His saints without the knowledge of the world, quite the opposite of the testimony of Scripture. This doctrine cannot be reconciled with the clear presentation in the Bible of the day in which Jesus Christ returns.

PRE-MILLENNIALISM: ANTICHRIST

It seems that many, following the aforementioned Darby, began to believe that there would be a world leader who directly challenge the authority of God. This leader is often called the Antichrist.

Why it is wrong: There is of course a rather pronounced problem: first, there is no single antichrist, and second, such men have already come:

1 John 2:18 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.

2 John 7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

PRE-MILLENNIALISM: TRIBULATION

Again, we are drawn back to the Darby-inspired movement, which taught that there was yet to come a terrible persecution of Christians referred to as the Tribulation. Many use Matthew 24, (which we earlier showed to be a past event) as a proof text:

Matthew 24:21 "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.

Why it is wrong: Jesus' mention of the tribulation remains in the context of the whole passage, which we have already seen to be the destruction of Jerusalem, not the end of the world. Thus we know why John himself perceived that he and his audience were in that very tribulation:

Revelation 1:9 I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The tribulation of the Christians of the first century was a very real event, recorded by many Roman historians. Both in the Bible and history we can see that the tribulation was a matter for their time and not ours.

HYPER-PRETERISM/AD 70

In recent times a new debate on prophetic language has been developed. It is sometimes called "hyper-preterism", "full-preterism", or simply the "AD 70 Doctrine". It is not a part of the pre-millennial error, but is another ideology altogether. Adherents to this idea might describe the following points as fundamental to the doctrine:

- In AD 70, the end of the Jewish age occurred.
- This was the final "end", the last coming.

- No other prophecy remains to be fulfilled, and Jesus is never to actually return physically.
- All of Matthew 24, Revelation pertain to AD 70, and the resurrection is symbolic/spiritual, not physical.
- There is no single Day of Judgment; instead we are judged when we die.

Most Christians simply ignore this doctrine, but it is necessary to understand the scriptural position on this idea, particularly as it seems to gain a foothold in modern thinking.

Why it is wrong: it is not merely a matter of personal opinion, but a matter of judgment. For one, those who believe such would not be able to partake of communion, as it is to be done “until He comes” (I Corinthians 11:26). As well, Paul states:

2 Timothy 2:17-18 And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some.

The major flaw is that the doctrine ignores the multiplicity of passages that speak to a literal, future, bodily resurrection of all.

John 5:28-29 "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Daniel 12:2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.

The resurrection of the saints is spoken of as a fundamental doctrine of Christ (Hebrews 6:1-3). It is one which we are told is the promise to all Christians. Therefore, we can see that Scripture does not endorse the AD 70 doctrine.

Chapter 8: The Nature of the Covenant

A *Covenant* is the legal instrument that God has throughout history dealt with mankind. Some of the more well known covenants in the Bible were with Noah, Abraham, and Israel. A covenant is typically

composed of two parts: a requirement, or law, and a promise, or reward. The word of God predicted that with the coming of Christ, a new (universal) covenant would be established so that God could interact with all mankind.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us that this new covenant, established by Christ, does away with the previous covenant(s):

Hebrews 9:15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Hebrews 10:9 then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second.

That previous covenant is generally understood to be the commandments and promises given to Israel by Moses on Mt Sinai in the book of Exodus. The existing covenant is understood to be that one established by Christ, called the *New Testament* (*Testament* means covenant).

There are many who disagree that a new covenant replaced an old one. Perhaps they see only a partial replacement; perhaps they see only an addendum to the first. In this chapter we examine some of the doctrines that are held today on this issue.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS/SABBATH KEEPING

In most courthouses around our nation stands a copy of the Ten Commandments. It is not for the religious purpose, but that it represented the power of codified law. However, there are a number of people from various denominations who hold that the Ten Commandments are still in effect, either in part or in totality. The following two quotes sum up the doctrinal statement of those who hold to this idea:

“In Matthew 5:17 Jesus says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”In this verse, Jesus gives a clear indication that the Ten Commandments are still to be followed and adhered to even in our generation and every generation to come until the day that Jesus returns.” ¹³

“The Ten Commandments are NOT done away! Now you can learn why YOU should keep this living, active, spiritual Law of God”¹⁴

It is the doctrine of some denominations that the Ten Commandments represent the basic rules of Godliness. Since all but one of these commandments are restated as being the law of Christ (James 2:8-12), truly the issue is whether or not these commandments are all that must be kept, or if we must keep the Sabbath (Saturday) as it was under the law of Moses.

Why it is wrong: the law of Moses did not exist prior to the events of Exodus 20. Yet God did not rebuke men such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, etc for their failure to keep the Sabbath. In fact, God said that the Sabbath was for Israel only:

*Exodus 31:16 'Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout **their** generations as a perpetual covenant.*

Paul would tell the Colossians that the Sabbath was a shadow of the things Christ would promise. The Hebrew writer tells us that the Christian Sabbath is in fact our heavenly reward, not something in this life.

¹³ All About GOD Ministries, <http://www.allabouttruth.org/10-commandments.htm>

¹⁴ Worldwide Church of God, (Armstrong)

Colossians 2:16-17 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

Hebrews 4:4-5, 11 For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest." Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

If the Sabbath is removed from the covenant, we can see that the Ten Commandments are spoken of not as a law to be kept in the New Testament, but as something finished by Christ.

Ephesians 2:14-15 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,

Colossians 2:13-14 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

It might be confusing that most of these laws are present in the Law of Christ, but the Ten Commandments is no longer the legal source of those laws. It is much like the situation that exists in a U.S. territory before it becomes a state. As an example, the laws of that territory might prohibit murder or robbery. When that territory becomes a state, a new legal system is enacted under a constitution. Murder and robbery are still forbidden, but it is under a new authority of law. So it is between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ (Romans 8:1-2); murder is a sin under both, but it is an different authority of Law.

Therefore, the keeping of the Sabbath or the adherence to the Ten Commandments as though it is the law of Christ is what the apostle Paul called "another Gospel" (Galatians 1:6-9).

THE PLACE OF ISRAEL IN CHRIST

While we have seen in the previous study that there are some who seek to impose the laws of the

previous covenant today, there are also some who seek to believe that the promises of the previous covenants are in place. Specifically, that the nation of Israel today, or the Jewish people, are still a particular people to God.

Under the covenant of Moses, God promised the children of Israel that as long as they kept the law given to them at Mt. Sinai, they would be a special people to God, and would inhabit the land of Canaan:

Deuteronomy 30:15 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess.

Scripture records that the children of Israel were unable to remain faithful to the covenant, and were removed from the land of promise:

2 Chronicles 36:15 And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy. Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand.

God at that same time began to promise a restoration and a new covenant, one which would not condemn. In our previous study we saw that to be the covenant of Christ, as mentioned in Jeremiah 31:31. This promise became clear on the day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:38-39 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

However, God also stated that the children of Israel who would not accept this covenant would be lost.

Acts 13:46-47 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

The promises of restoration made to the Israelites became the kingdom of Christ, and was a blessing to the whole of mankind. This truth ends the place of the Jew in the scheme of redemption, and establishes that all men are now called of God. In Ephesians 2, Paul makes it clear that Jesus died with the intent and purpose of removing the distinction between Jew and Gentile. In I Peter 2, Peter tells the Gentiles and Jews that they are now a nation of a new people, the people of God.

Ephesians 2:14-16 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

I Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Yet there are many today who refuse to accept that there is no longer a distinction, but instead promote a distinction before God of the Jew and the Gentile. Sometimes the term "Zionist" is applied to a Christian who holds such a conviction. Consider these statements:

God the Father, Almighty, chose the ancient nation and people of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to reveal His plan of redemption for the world. They remain elect

of God, and without the Jewish nation His redemptive purposes for the world will not be completed.¹⁵

This proclamation, made by the 3rd International Zionist Congress, reflects the beliefs of a number of charismatic denominations and individuals who are well known today.

Why it is wrong: The problem is that God made it clear His vision for Israel was perfected with Christ, and those who did not accept this were considered not to be His people. Consider Paul's statements:

Galatians 3:7-8 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed."

Romans 9:6-8 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

The Israel of ultimate redemption is not a people by the flesh, but by faith. Hence the church is the "Heavenly Jerusalem" to this new spiritual Israel.

Hebrews 12:22-23 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect

Jesus died in order to do away with distinction between peoples. Seeking a restoration of the old order is a rejection of the accomplishment of the death of Christ. His death we see was not to further divide men, but to place all mankind under His authority, and to make two nations (Jews and Gentiles) into one nation (Christians).

THE GOSPELS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

¹⁵ <http://christianactionforisrael.org/congress.html>

It is generally understood by most that the four accounts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Gospels, are the cornerstone of the new covenant, or the New Testament. Yet there are some who have espoused the idea that since the context of the Gospel accounts take place during the old covenant, the contents must be considered such as well. This would then nullify any teaching by Jesus Christ or His disciples prior to Acts 2.

Why it is wrong: Such ideas are generally presented not from a deliberate study of Scripture, but from the perspective of a doctrinal flaw that needs to be corrected. For example, if one does not agree with the teaching of Jesus on marriage, divorce and remarriage in Matthew 19 (that one who has married an unlawfully divorced person lives in adultery), it can be invalidated by teaching that the doctrine is part of the old law. It would be like saying that since the Bill of Rights was drafted prior to the signing of the Constitution, it has no effect.

Perhaps our Savior knew such things would be said. When He arose from the grave He made it clear to us that the things He taught in the Gospels before He had arisen were the foundation of His new covenant.

Matthew 28:19-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Thus with one statement we have confirmed that the doctrinal content of the Gospels is in fact the doctrine of Christ, legally binding today. Marriage today is bound by the law of Matthew 19.

Chapter 9: The Nature of the Church

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus declared that He would build a church that would stand the test of time. We saw in previous chapters that this church was the earthly manifestation of the kingdom of prophecy. The church was built on the foundation of Jesus Christ Himself, and established through His apostles and prophets:

1 Corinthians 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,

The purpose of the church is not salvation itself, but to preserve those who are saved in doctrine (I Timothy 3:15) and correction (Ephesians 4:12-17) until the return of Jesus Christ, and to be the instrument of our worship and adoration of God.

Our adversary knows that if he can corrupt the church, he can influence men and insert his doctrine into our lives. While the church that is universal is always perfect, the local church can fail and fall away (II Thessalonians 2:3, Revelation 3:2). This chapter looks at doctrines that at their very heart destroy the sanctity of the church that Jesus built.

DENOMINATIONALISM

What does it mean, “to denominate”? Most understand what it means to “nominate” something or someone; “*I nominate John Doe for office*” would be a way to say that someone has been named for a purpose. If one were to say “*I de-nominate*”, it would clearly mean that they un-name someone. Thus, it might be simplest to say that a denomination is an organization that has un-named someone or something. In spiritual matters, there is but one name that matters; therefore, a denomination is a group that has left the name of Christ.

Acts 4:12 "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Ephesians 1:21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

For many, denominationalism is simply a way of church work. They see no harm in the process of collectivizing the works of a group of churches under one name, authority or oversight. An example is this proud proclamation by the Disciples of Christ:

"Approval of the provisional design marked the passage of the Disciples into denominational maturity. Officially named the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), they became a

*church.*¹⁶

Most people feel no shame or sorrow over their identity with a particular denomination. They do not realize that at its heart denominationalism intends to create a counterfeit of the universal church.

Why it is wrong: Jesus did not work to establish multiple churches, each with their own doctrines, but instead to establish one church, with one head and one law.

Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

The division we call denominationalism was known in the first century, and condemned:

1 Corinthians 1:10-12 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Does it really matter by what name we are called? The disciples of the first century would be quite shocked that we even asked, since they would be called to give their lives for only one name. The Scriptures call the church the “bride of Christ”. Imagine that a man married a woman, and she becomes his wife. Imagine now that when she goes to change her name, she declines to take his name, but instead takes the name of the man down the street. Men do the same when they apply various names and titles to fellowship.

Denominationalism also replaces Christ with men as the head of the universal church. Whether that man is called the Archbishop, the Pope, the Patriarch, the President, a convention, a council, or a committee, such replacement is fundamentally evil. Consider Paul’s warning about such actions:

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come

¹⁶ A Handbook for Today's Disciples in the Christian Church by Duane Cummins, 2003, pg 15

unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

If the temple of God is the church (I Corinthians 3:16), and the place of God is as the head (Ephesians 4:15), then those people who take the place as the head of the church are the very “Sons of Perdition” spoken of in Scripture.

ECUMINICALISM AND COOPERATION

The word “*ecumenical*” means “cooperative”; the doctrine of ecumenicalism might be described as believing that it is permissive to have a relationship with other churches, even those with doctrines contrary to our own. Among some churches of Christ today it is simply called “church cooperation”.

Within denominations, the Ecumenical Movement arose after World War I in forms such as the *World Council of Churches*. Generally, it was composed of Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican churches, and in modern times has moved into the protestant denominations. In the United States, the National Council of Churches was established by multiple protestant denominations in 1908 as means to an ecumenical end.

It was in the 1950’s that churches of Christ began the cooperative works movement. Large movements for worldwide evangelism, modern media evangelism, educational edification and generic benevolence required a significantly larger funding base, and the cooperative effort was born.

Why it is wrong: Within the New Testament, the churches of Christ were shown to be self-organized and self-administered. We see Paul’s direction to Titus, demonstrating that churches had their own independent elders. We see also that when funds were collected for use outside the local church, there was no agency formed, nor was a single church the repository for such assistance.

Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—

2 Corinthians 9:1,7 Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

Perhaps, too, we find a powerful anecdote in the events during the reign of Jehoshaphat, king of

Judah. It was his policy to make peace with the northern kingdom of Israel, and then to work in cooperation against their enemies. When he returned from this (failed) venture of ecumenicalism, he was condemned by the prophet Jehu for being in league with one who was at enmity with God.

2 Chronicles 19:1-2 Then Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned safely to his house in Jerusalem. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to King Jehoshaphat, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Therefore the wrath of the LORD is upon you."

It is not God's desire that we should "work together" even with those churches that have similar views, let alone to have fellowship with the works of darkness. The word of God speaks to the idea that each church is accountable alone for its works (as seen in the second and third chapter of the Revelation of John).

INSTITUTIONALISM

In the 1800s among protestant churches there arose the idea that the church itself was insufficient to accomplish the tasks that it was charged with, such as evangelism or benevolence (Ephesians 4:12). How could a local church fulfill the work of saving the lost all over the world? Among denominations, societies and agencies were established that would work with churches to do these works. One such Missionary Society was the cause of the falling away of the Disciples of Christ denomination.

By the end of the 19th century there were a number of church supported orphanages, missionary societies, education facilities, and other such works of benevolence and evangelism that were the driving forces for denominations. What ultimately came of this was that these organizations soon ceased to be subservient to the churches and instead took control of them. Church-funded schools became the source of the doctrines of these denominations, calling themselves *seminaries*. Benevolent societies broke themselves off or actually took the leadership of churches (such as the Salvation Army). Thus, many denominations surrendered their identity to the devices they had created.

To this day, many are unaware of this destruction brought about so long ago. Still, many seek to "broaden" the local church's work using instruments of benevolence, evangelism and edification.

Why it is wrong: the error of the doctrine of institutionalism is multiple. First, it does not have an authority to submit the work Jesus gave to the church to another agency. We are told in Scripture:

1 Corinthians 4:6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.

Revelation 22:18-19 For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

As well, we see in Scripture the entire work of the church ably accomplished by the local church (II Corinthians 8-9, Acts 11:28-30).

Finally, the church's financial system was one which was supported entirely and exclusively by the free-will offering (as described in I Corinthians 16:1-2, the offering of a Christian is done without coercion, as they desire) of its members alone. Such limited funding is a necessary inference to the restricted work and purpose in the church.

1 Corinthians 16:2 On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper; that there be no collections when I come.

How could it be pleasing to God for Jesus to die to build a church with a purpose, and we pass that purpose on to other instruments of our own creation?

CLERGY SYSTEM

The word "clergy" is from the same etymology as the word "clerk", It comes from the Greek word for "lot", as in the casting of lots (Acts 1:26). In our times, it has taken to mean a particular class of persons within a denomination that typically are perceived to have a unique access to God.

The first issue that comes to the Clergy doctrine is the complete misapplication of Biblical terms and works. In most denominations, the clergy are described as Pastors, Priests, Cardinals, Reverends, Ministers, Parsons, Bishops, Elders, Fathers, Presidents, Popes, Apostles or Deacons. We see many of these words found to describe Christians and works in the New Testament, but the clergy doctrine relies upon a process of ordination, or selection, by previously ordained persons. Among some denominations, the implication is

that this process has been carried on since the times of the Apostles. Thus the authorization of the appointment is found not through scripture, but through tradition.

Why it is wrong: The danger of the doctrine is multiple. First, the clergy system creates a necessary disparity between the clergy and the average church member, or *laity*. This two-class system is in conflict with the uniformity of the body and brethren as described in the Bible:

1 Corinthians 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 2:6....whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man.....

Jesus despised the hierarchy of religious men in His day, condemning the teachers of the law for their love of titles:

Matthew 23:6-8 "They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.' But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren."

Second, the clergy system insists that the clergy are possessed by a particular form of the Holy Spirit, and are therefore superior in their understanding of Scriptures. This has progressed to the degree that the Bible was banned for laity by the Catholic church in the 13th century:

*Canon 14. We prohibit also that the laity should not be permitted to have the books of the Old or New Testament; we most strictly forbid their having any translation of these books.-
The Church Council of Toulouse 1229 AD¹⁷*

¹⁷ Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe , by Edward Peters, 1980, pg 194-195

In previous studies we saw how many have suggested that the Bible cannot be understood by the average person (and consequently saw that it was a false doctrine). The clergy system is the natural evolution of that doctrine. It is no surprise that some put unusual qualifications on clergy, such as celibacy (I Timothy 4:1-3).

Third, the clergy system provides an opportunity for false teachers to present their ideas undisputed. We can see how one who claims to have a superior knowledge of Scripture by divine or supernatural appointment would reject the statements of laity from the Scriptures. This perhaps is why the clergy system is so common.

Fourth, the clergy system destroys the Biblical ideas of leadership with counterfeit substitutions. Scripture makes it clear that the position of overseer is the same as Elder, Bishop, or Pastor (literally “shepherd”).

Acts 20:17, 28 From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.....Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

The clergy system is why few people have the understanding to know that a pastor and a preacher are not the same work in Scripture. Likewise, a minister, preacher, parson (meaning speaker) would be the same work, but to many they are different.

Finally, there are some titles that are simply profane and sacrilegious to apply to ourselves. There are a number of religious titles, such as Reverend, Father, or Pope, which are reserved for God the Father. Consider that the only use of the word “reverend” is here (in the King James Version)

Psalm 111:9 He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name.

Such obvious usurpation of divine character brings to mind Paul’s warning of the Son of Perdition, the lost one who will lead others astray, when he describes this person:

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who

opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

TRANSUBSTANTIATION

There are a number of errors with the observance of communion in the world today, but few could be characterized as a doctrine, which is the focus of this study. Many fail to observe what was done by the church that Jesus built (i.e. the first day of the week, Acts 20:7), or fail to use the proper emblems (as described in the Gospels). There is one well known false doctrine which is found within communion: that of transubstantiation.

The word itself means a change in substance, and refers to the belief that the communion emblems miraculously (but not visibly) transform themselves into the literal and actual blood and body of Christ upon consumption. It is a doctrine of the Catholic, Orthodox and Assyrian churches that this process occurs. These churches teach that Jesus' sermon on the Bread of Life teach transubstantiation.

John 6:51-54 "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Why it is wrong: The abuse of this passage is that it changes what is clearly allegorical to literal. The transubstantiation doctrine insists on a literal "flesh and blood", but then insists that the "eternal life" found within the same sentence is figurative.

But it is the deeper reading that proves this doctrine false. Jesus tells us His meaning in a few passages later; the "life" He gives in his flesh and blood is the Word, the Spirit of Life.

John 6:63 "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

Jesus was not speaking about communion in John 6, He was speaking about the Word of God, and how the Holy Spirit would inspire the word to give us life. Transubstantiation as a doctrine lacks Biblical substantiation.