

OUR DOCTRINAL PROFESSION

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“Where is the local and universal unity [in faith and doctrine which scripture repeatedly calls us to]?”

“While it is understandable that ignorance, rejection and distortion of true doctrine should exist among non-believers, it is quite discouraging and plainly irrational that among professing Christian believers and institutions it has become so easy to find all manner of teaching to affirm whatever deviant lifestyle anyone should desire to pursue (2Ti 4:3).”

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“... many professing Christians will just not allow themselves to be bothered with investigating doctrinal integrity. They fail to see its importance to and impact upon proper individual and corporate Christian practice. As long as the church lawn is mowed, the supper is staffed, the VBS is scheduled, the speaker for the missions conference is booked, and folks are getting along and having fun, then all is well!”

“This has drawn local churches away from God’s agenda and true doctrine, to be redeployed in the cause of the liberal cultural agenda of the day, the ultimate goal of which is to enable folks to feel better about their sin - rather than to be rid of it!”

A more effective conveyance of the thoughts of this writing will result if the reader references the indicated scripture passages.

Also, the word “church” is used throughout for the benefit of the vast majority who use it in place of what should more properly be referred to as the called-out *assembly* (the *ecclesia*).

Our foundational doctrinal position is posted [below](#). First, however ...

It is quite lamentable in these modern days that we are forced to waste adjectives such as “true,” “legitimate,” “genuine” and others to qualify “church,” “Christian,” “Christianity,” “believer,” “salvation,” “religion,” “faith” and other terms whose definitions ought to require no clarification. However, since we cannot deny the reality that we live in an era of widespread ignorance of scripture and scriptural concepts, it is of no use being stubborn. Instead, as true believers we can actually turn this nuisance to our advantage for God’s purposes. Rather than an irritation, the challenge to constantly differentiate genuine scriptural doctrine from the various and numerous counterfeit offerings actually presents a bountiful blessing of witnessing and teaching opportunities.

For no longer may we assume that folks possess a working knowledge of things Christian or an accurate view of God and the teachings of His Word. In times past, even self-professing non-believers were generally familiar with biblical history and Christianity’s essential teachings, though they rejected them or maintained apathy. It seems that more and more now, in addition to the usual and expected encounters with folks who are untaught, disinterested or confused, we find that many who *claim* to hold true Christian doctrine actually possess an unavailing, simplistic version of it - or an outright erroneous one.

Acts 20:30 and 2Pe 2:1-2 warn us of false teachers - just as false prophets plagued God’s people in Old Testament times. Jude 4 points out that deceivers had already infiltrated the early New Testament church. From the inception of the post-resurrection church, impostors of all sorts have been masquerading under the same banner as true Christians (2Co 11:13-15). This has created great and ongoing confusion, making it difficult for the unwary to separate legitimate, God-provided doctrine from all the inventions and distortions of man.

As a result, many folks who undertake a sincere search still fail to “discover” the truth. Some become trapped in one error or another. Others find themselves lost in a maze of false teaching; always searching, but never confident of finding the truth. Some of these eventually abandon their search in frustration. Still others, bombarded with a variety of nonsense, mistake genuine doctrine for more of the same - and dismiss it along with the rest. And sadly, countless folks simply refuse to concern themselves with God or the doctrines of scripture at all, wrongly persuaded by all the chaos that the attempt to resolve the truth for themselves is impossible, unnecessary or just not worth the effort.

This presents a variety of challenges for true believers, to whom God has delegated the responsibility for spreading the truth of the gospel; the message of reconciliation (2Co 5:18-20). Though we would hope to reach folks before they reject the truth or accept any of the substitutes, even so the task involves labor and commitment - with no guarantee of "success." And when this hope is not realized, the work becomes even more problematic.

In all cases, we must first and foremost build sincere, loving relationships (1Co 13:1-3; 2Co 1:3-5; 2:4; 6:3-13; 1Th 2:5-12), thus creating an environment which allows the greatest opportunity for effective sharing and acceptance of the truth. This is no small challenge, and not at all the easiest component of our overall assignment. But the adage applies: "No one cares how much you know - until they know how much you care."

Moreover, it is critical that we remain humbly submitted to God, realizing that it is not the brilliance of our presentation, the commitment of our labor or the profundity of our wisdom which effects salvation in souls. This supernatural work requires the power and wisdom of God; we are unable and unqualified in ourselves. God must direct, oversee and empower the effort. His superintendence alone enables and equips those He calls to the work (2Co 3:4-6; Heb 13:20-21; Col 1:28-29).

To the one who has already rejected the truth (Heb 6:4-6), we can offer nothing else; nothing more, nothing new. However, having established a personal relationship as above, a door of opportunity may open at some future juncture, allowing us to revisit the truth with them - perhaps in a divinely-arranged circumstance which will elicit a different response.

With those currently snared in the trap of false doctrine, we are challenged to master and handle the Word of God with a level of accuracy, conviction and confidence (2Ti 2:15; 1Th 1:5; 2Co 3:4) which enables us to clearly, boldly, and fearlessly (Col 4:3-6; Act 4:31; 20:27; 28:31; Eph 6:19-20) contrast the truth of God's Word with the error they have embraced. Yet, we must be ever mindful of what is at stake: We must be effective for *God's* purposes, from *His* view - not ours. The mere winning of intellectual debates does not save souls or necessarily bring glory, honor and praise to God. In fact, such "debates," when improperly conducted, often do more harm than good to the cause of Christ.

We will also encounter folks who have already escaped various entrapments of deceptive teachings - but a significant number of these move not from error to

truth, but merely from one error to another. Others, having weathered traumatic experiences, become apathetic - no longer interested in God or His Word. And then there are those who are calloused and bitter; hostile toward any further attempt to present genuine scriptural doctrine. In all these cases, we are forced to rehabilitate the image and reputation of the truth (2Pe 2:2). This requires faithful commitment, loving compassion, great patience and careful instruction (2Ti 4:2). Again, we must maintain a proper perspective; we are not out to win a competition - we are ministering reconciliation to God (2Co 5:18-20).

Finally, reminded that true conviction ultimately relies upon God's working and timing, we must always be prepared to step aside or move on from the current effort - yet prayerfully hopeful for another opportunity should He so arrange.

Turning now from those who are lost to the community of professing Christian believers - and more to the point of this writing: There can be only one true and legitimate set of Christian theological doctrine; that which is genuinely faithful to the scriptures precisely because it is exclusively and purely drawn from this God-provided, pristine source - unblemished by additions, subtractions, twistings, misinterpretations or modifications of any sort; untainted by the corruptions of men, whether intentional or not; undefiled by those who abuse it for personal profit (2Co 2:17) rather than applying it for God's purposes.

Setting aside, for the purpose of this writing, the false doctrines of self-identified, non-Christian enterprises, if all professing Christian entities maintained this one legitimate doctrinal set in common (they should, but this is far from the case), there would be no need to concern ourselves with the irrational assortment of false doctrines and false and/or incomplete "gospels" proliferating among the illogical variety of such groups. As it is, there is great need to address this concern - but scant attention and effort applied to it.

Beyond that, there is all manner of continuing argument and calculated separation caused by an inexcusable inability or outright unwillingness to pursue and achieve the doctrinal unity which God demands of true believers. This diversity of doctrine among those pictured in scripture as one body under one Head who is Christ (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:4-5; Col 3:15; 1:18a) is plainly irrational. Satan must revel in such senseless chaos.

Proper Christian doctrine consists of the true and accurate teachings of scripture alone. These are fixed - unaffected by popular opinion, cultural

influence, ecumenical consensus or the demands or consequences of situation and circumstance. God has graciously provided them for our benefit.

However, when a particular local church is discussed these days, the most common and predictable questions to arise are: Where is it (the building) located; how is the facility? Who is *THE* pastor; what is he (or *she*) like? How is the preaching style? How long is the service? Do they have great music? They don't do any of that crazy stuff, do they? ... Concerns related to doctrine (or organizational and administrative model and practice) are sadly absent.

Long ago lost are the concepts that the church is not the building, but rather the called of God (the *ecclesia*), and that every local congregation of true believers is part of the one and only true Church. There is "my" church and "our" church and "your" church and "their" church - but whatever happened to *God's* Church, the scriptural picture of one Body whose Head is Christ? (Rom 12:4-5; 1Co 10:15-17; 12:12-13, 27; Eph 4:3-5; Col 3:15)

Of course, all the folks in all these illogically separated "churches" put on their best smiles and magnanimously allow that all the others are right with God, too - and destined for Heaven just as they are. "We all believe in and worship the same God ...," etc., etc. So then, why not obey His command to unite in faith and doctrine? Where is the local and universal unity of Rom 15:5-7; 1Co 1:10; Phil 2:1-2; Eph 4:13; 2Co 13:11; Act 4:32; and ultimately, Jn 17:20-23?

Instead, virtually every community now offers the obligatory spectrum of "Christian" church choices - with the ubiquitous city-limits sign: "The Churches of [Our Town] Welcome You." *Churches?* Even many of the tiniest hamlets have the full assortment, with a "church" on every corner. And each Sunday morning, the various community social clubs dutifully report to their assigned buildings to get their weekly dose of favorite doctrinal flavor.

This touches on another error which has infected the local church: denominationalism (and other designed divisions and distinctions which justify themselves with loud proclamations of, "We are not a denomination!") Though it has more pervasively manifested itself in modern times, this error crept into the Church shortly after its founding. Paul was forced to address it in 1Co 1:10-13.

There are no "church denominations" in God's economy. The ongoing and ever-greater division among those who claim to be of one family - children of the

same Father, brothers and sisters of one another and Jesus Himself, filled with the one Holy Spirit - is surely a grievance to the Holy Spirit.

The NT is replete with calls to unity, as modeled in the Trinity itself, and as Jesus prayed in Jn 17. Such unity cannot be achieved and is not being sought when folks attach a denominational label to themselves. Lack of unity among Christians is perhaps the single-most offered excuse encountered from non-believers as they resist evangelistic efforts. (Eph 4:3-6, 30; Rom 15:5; 2Co 6:14)

Sadly, many (most?) denominational Christians have no idea what their denominational “distinctives” actually are, why they are necessary, or how their denomination differs from all the others anyhow. Many “churchgoers” - even “church” leaders - easily move from one denomination to another when circumstances arise (marriage, moving to a new location, “church” closure or merge, and more). That simply proves that their denominational separation wasn’t necessary after all.

In sad irony, many of these separated congregations do indeed hold similar and even essentially identical doctrinal convictions. And their separation is also not owing to size, space, geographical community limits, diversity of culture and language within otherwise common boundaries, or any other appropriate reason for the united in Christ to meet and carry on the work of the Church separately (the legitimate concept of “working together separately”).

Rather (and even where doctrinal disagreement does exist), these divisions have been forged primarily with wedges of pride, heritage, tradition, ethnicity, national origin, leaders’ egos, the seeking of ministry niches, worldly politics, improper partnership with state, and practical concerns at odds with God’s concerns. That has led to the evolution of and allegiance to “denominational distinctives” conjured up by men over the course of history; developed despite the obvious predictability of the inevitable alienation which would result. As James says (in a different context) in 3:10, “My brothers, this should not be!”

Actually, a large part of what keeps these Christians in disobedient disunity is merely unnecessary and silly disagreement over church administrative polity; a common ignorance of or refusal to adopt the scriptural model. This has led to the implementation of diverse improper structures in place of God’s design. But how can this disunity and such clearly self-proclaimed and self-identified division exist and be tolerated among those called to be united in the one true

Body of Christ? Is Christ's body to somehow exist as the sum of separate and distinctively identifiable, disagreeing factions?

And yet, it is sadly ironic that in order to justify and excuse their disunity when confronted, each group will betray the self-conviction that their disunity is not justifiable or pleasing to God by quickly claiming, in well-rehearsed fashion, that there really are no essential differences between them; that they truly are united. One is then left to wonder and to ask the obvious: So why not simply raise one banner over all? A disingenuous attempt is made to claim that the banner of Christ does indeed reign over all, but that claim is easily seen as specious when, under the banner of Christ, each group proudly waves their own - and shamelessly maintains their separation and chosen doctrinal niches.

In final actuality, the details and reasoning behind all the nonsense which has led to and continues to drive these divisions is, in great measure, known exclusively to the scholarly elites and leaders within each denomination. The average congregant is unaware of and does not bother himself with any consideration as to why the 50 folks meeting in several adjacent buildings, each designed to hold hundreds or more, do not simply walk across the street and meet together - or, where the numbers are large enough to require separate assemblies, why there is nevertheless a need to label each one so differently. Though many would never consider changing affiliation, most could not explain why - because they do not really know why.

Even so, marriage, relocation, and other life changes do force some to switch denominations after all - some reluctantly, and even, perhaps, with some angst; others with no qualms at all. Many local church pastors also manage to cross over to a different denomination for various practical reasons. And some whole congregations switch affiliation in midstream for reasons usually not fully understood by or of any real importance to its members.

Still, while denominationalism is to some degree undeniably intertwined with the fallacy of varied and false doctrine, it is not driven entirely or even mostly by doctrinal concerns. In fact, where doctrinal differences do exist, they are merely convenient excuses for perpetuating the divisions; the other factors driving the denominational separations are actually more powerful than the mere differing of doctrinal views. It is the separation and denominational pride which are more coveted than any loyalty to whatever doctrine is deemed to be more faithful to scripture. In many cases, these doctrinal differences could easily be resolved.

Indeed, from one church of the same denomination to another, there is often the same manner of minor differences in doctrinal view as exists between differing denominations. Again, the congregants themselves do not really much care.

In the end, while denominationalism is fraught with its own distinctive set of flaws, it is simply - as the phenomenon of doctrinal chaos - another tool of Satan in his attempts to disrupt, distract and destroy that which God has designed and provided for His perfect purposes. Of course, Satan must and will fail.

Returning to this writing's focus - the errors of false doctrine and doctrinal diversity: The erosion of sound doctrinal teaching, understanding and application among professing Christians has been occurring, once again, since the church's beginning - and it continues in steady, incremental fashion. Of late, it would appear that the steps of decline have become larger and have significantly quickened in pace. Teachings which were surely unthinkable just a relatively short time ago are now ruling the day - not only in the court of popular public opinion where they are nevertheless still surprising and shocking, but even, and most lamentably, in bastions of so-called "Christianity" where they must be characterized as nothing short of outright apostasy and blasphemy.

Of course, God will always occupy the ultimate and empirically authoritative throne. And the declarations of His eternal, never-changing Word will always stand. The final judgment and sentence upon men in their foolishness will be issued from the uncompromising divine bench, not the one occupied by ever-evolving worldly opinion, elitist philosophy and progressive religion.

It is not that the philosophies and practices condoned and promulgated by these corrupt teachings did not always exist; it is the fact that folks have now championed the cause of repackaging them as legitimate, moral, right, and true - somehow viable and consistent with right relationship and obedience to God.

Worse, opposing these detestable lifestyles and specific sinful practices - on the authority of God's Word; in accordance with His view - has now become, so their proponents claim, what is truly wrong and offensive. Rather than simply living their own lives on the basis of their aberrant beliefs, they are on a mission to indoctrinate everyone else with them, as well. In the process, they seek to snuff out any view rooted in genuine truth and to scuttle any effort to unmask their own teachings and practices for the abominations they actually are.

Although it has always been so, modern culture finds itself more definitively at the crossroads of Isa 5:20-21. Professing Christians ought to know better than to join the non-believing world in such an eternally-fateful exchange (1Jn 2:15-17; Jam 4:4-5). But it has become commonplace now for otherwise educated, reasonable and wise folks to offer and claim as legitimate teachings of God what is easily refuted from even an elementary grasp of the scriptures.

This departure from the solid, reliable moorings which God has graciously provided may be largely attributed to an historical and ongoing failure to properly hand down the fullness of God's truth from generation to generation (Dt 4:9b-14; 6:1-25; 11:1-32; 31:11-13; 32:45-47). We see an example of the results in Judg 2:10-15. The New Testament renewal of these Old Testament directives, though differently focused, is the Great Commission of Mt 28:18-20.

In both cases, this responsibility was entrusted to those who could fulfill it with unparalleled confidence rooted in first-hand, intimate communion with God. The delivered Israelites, and the disciples who walked with Jesus, had both experienced God's power and presence in miracle and provision so unmistakable and profound that even their enemies acknowledged and feared God (Dt 32:31; Jos 2:8-24; 4:23-5:1; 2Ch 20:27-30; Mt 27:54; Phil 1:27-28).

God intended for His OT people and His NT disciples to faithfully pass along what He had shown and taught them and had done among them - with freshness, accuracy, excitement and urgency. This testimony would provide great encouragement, motivation and guidance for true worship and obedience among God's followers. Among the lost, an authoritative proclamation of genuine truth and accurate history would be compelling, serving as a solemn warning of the imminent danger threatening to engulf them, while also revealing the Source, power, wisdom and unfailing nature of the plan to escape it.

The OT historical record describes the vacillating commitment and "faith" of God's people (Judg 2:10-19; Hos 13:5-6). When life was good and their enemies were at bay, they turned away from God and His teachings to indulge their sinful desires. When times were hard and their enemies held sway, they cried out to God and returned to His merciful and gracious protection and provision, once again worshiping and obeying Him. Their hearts were torn between the numerous and various false gods and idolatry all around them (largely due to their disobedience of God's command to eliminate them), and worship of the One who had shown Himself to be faithful, sovereign and true.

In the NT, the early post-resurrection church initially experienced great growth and success (Act 2:37-47). However, just as the passing of time subsequent to the uniquely momentous events of the Exodus led the people of that deliverance to take their focus off the One who had undeniably and powerfully delivered them, the history of man subsequent to the equally unparalleled events of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus has also witnessed a turning to more mundane interests by those who might otherwise enjoy the even greater, eternal benefits of a far more prodigious deliverance.

A major cause of this turning away from God has been a combination of the neglect or outright rejection of true doctrine, and the promotion of corrupted doctrine in its place. And yet, the teachings of Moses in the OT and Jesus Himself in the NT were being ignored, rejected and distorted even as both still walked the earth. True doctrine - and God's "right" to declare it and to hold folks accountable to it - has been under siege all the while since.

False doctrine has now become so rampant that it is difficult, humanly speaking, for the truth to be heard above the din or recognized amid the confusion. As mentioned, many offer this as an excuse for abandoning the effort (or neglecting to undertake one at all) to determine the true teachings of God's Word. But God will judge them for failing to investigate the scriptures for themselves (Rom 1:19-20; Pr 15:14; 18:15; 19:8; 23:12; Act 17:11). In failing to do so, they despise God's gracious provision and preservation of His Word (2Ti 3:16), His patience in awaiting their repentance (2Pe 3:9), and the abundant and marvelous evidences He has masterfully arranged so that faith in Him and His Word is actually quite reasonable (Act 14:17; 17:22-31).

(See "[God Holds Us Responsible](#)")
(Module 6a of the study entitled, "[God's Plan of Salvation](#)")

On one hand, Rom 1:18 and Eph 4:17-19 indicate that the failure of the rebellious lost to recognize and embrace the truth is due to their own dedicated pursuit of evil. Devotion to wickedness suppresses the knowledge of God. This preoccupation with and enjoyment of sinful pleasures leaves folks unavailable for an appointment with the truth, thus preventing them from acknowledging what God has mercifully placed in their very midst (Dt 30:11-14; Rom 10:6-8) until it will be too late - that day when everyone will do so (Phil 2:9-11).

On the other hand, those who do seek the truth encounter a different complication: the invention of *new* "truth." Man has discovered that doctrine can be created to suit his own desires (2Ti 4:3-4) - even if old truths and God's

desires must be set aside. These creations are then easily sold to the masses because they are strategically designed to reflect what sinners desire and are already enjoying. However, no extent of widespread consensus among men concerning what is or is not true will ever replace the unchangeable dictates of God - and woe will surely fall upon those who pursue such folly.

Still, so-called “Christian leaders” continue to turn away from serving God and His eternal desires in order to accommodate the worldly desires of “Christian customers.” The phenomenon of seeker-sensitive churches flows from this effort to placate the “customer” rather than to trust and obey the Master. The former is better for “business,” which is sadly what much of “Christianity” today has been reduced to. No business wants to drive away its customers, but when the Word of God is taught accurately and boldly, those whose interests lie in mere religion or the effort of 2Ti 4:3 are likely to move on to a competitor’s business conveniently located on an adjacent corner or a short distance down the street (Jn 6:66). And so, the presentation of “truth” has been adjusted accordingly; driven by motivations apart from the serving of God’s interests.

Meanwhile, as this “evolution of truth” finds greater acceptance among an ever-growing majority, as it finds broader application and becomes a panacea for quieting the nagging conscience, as the volume of the brazen protest against God and His truth increases, as it becomes increasingly unacceptable (and downright repulsive; *even illegal*) to employ the Word of God as the trusted blueprint for life and the empirical standard for guidance and correction, as modern technology, political correctness, social “norms” and the sports, entertainment and media industries (among others) facilitate its promulgation, and as the natural embarrassment associated with what everyone inherently knows is wrong steadily diminishes (Zeph 3:5), we are being invaded and overrun by a shameless, non-stop parade of blasphemy and debauchery.

For just as it was in the period of the Judges, modern times continue to find the kingship and authority of God being ignored and denied; everyone does what seems fit in his own eyes (Judg 17:6; 21:25). Nevertheless, the remnant of God’s faithful followers perseveres - maintaining and spreading true doctrine in the face of extremely adverse conditions (Jer 42:1-3; Act 8:1-4; Heb 11:32-38; Mic 5:7; Rom 11:5; Jam 5:10). Despite this godly effort, however, the overall mission to communicate God’s Word in a manner which preserves its accuracy and highlights its imperatives would nonetheless be characterized as a dismal failure if judged by prevailing contemporary lifestyles. Surely, the Holy Spirit is grieved (Eph 4:30) by the ongoing decline of societal mores, some of which is

shamelessly engaged in by folks claiming to be God's children. But clearly, those claims must be false (Jn 1:12; Tit 1:16; 1Jn 2:3-6).

Conversely, as mentioned, Satan must take great delight in this pervasive doctrinal confusion. While it is understandable that ignorance, rejection and distortion of true doctrine should exist among non-believers, it is quite discouraging and plainly irrational that among professing Christian believers and institutions it has become so easy to find all manner of teaching to affirm whatever deviant lifestyle anyone should desire to pursue (2Ti 4:3, as above).

Still, the current state of moral decadence caused by the rejection and corruption of sound doctrine did not occur overnight. But its advancement, boldness and acceptance within the social, political and "religious" spheres has escalated in recent times. Although there is truth in the argument that the sins of the present have always been with us, it cannot be denied that their flagrant manifestation and shameless public display, their "official" sanction by top "authorities" in all venues (including the "church"), and the increasing difficulty to employ the truth of God's Word in an effort to bring reason and sanity to the situation are all portents of great and imminent spiritual danger.

Today, many "Christians" believe that everyone who claims to "believe in God" (in whatever way that holds meaning for them) can join together in working for God's purposes. Further, some fail to see the error in partnering with those who do not believe in God at all (2Co 6:14-17a) - as long as they are "nice" people and are willing to tolerate or overlook our "faith." As the "church" increasingly adopts and incorporates secular philosophies, it has even fallen into the ultimate trap of celebrating "diversity" of doctrine. Any true and thinking Christian ought to realize that such doctrinal diversity precludes any meaningful unity of purpose. We cannot allow secular influences and worldly "wisdom" to take hold and spread in the Christian community. It is the Christian Church which God has designed and commanded to do the influencing! (Mt 5:13-16; Col 4:5-6)

Godly excitement and true fulfillment can be found only when believers are united in the sole body of truth and doctrine which is legitimate from *God's* view - that which is of Him alone. There can be no true or meaningful partnership in the work and role God has assigned to His Church apart from the sole purpose and effort worth uniting for: magnifying and glorifying the one true God, serving Him through serving others in spirit and in truth. Any other doctrine is stamped with Satan's fingerprints; any other effort is doomed to failure.

And there is an obvious distinction to be made: On one hand, there is the practical realization that despite careful vigilance, our own held doctrine falls short of complete and final perfection; that we rely on God's protection and His provision for individual and corporate growth, development and correction; that we must remain humble, teachable and willing to make whatever adjustments are necessary to align ourselves with His Word, His will and His purpose.

On the other hand, there is the willful tolerance of improper doctrine due to deliberate corruption, intellectual pride, scholastic elitism, ignorance (due to lazy-mindedness or other causes), or negligence of our responsibility to investigate and confirm what we are being taught (Act 17:11).

There is quite a difference between active and continual self-examination and purification of what we hold as truth; removing and tossing away the chaff - and the casual tolerance, negligent introduction, or passionate promotion of error.

The bottom line is this: Operating out of any doctrinal set not rooted in scripture alone is to partner with Satan (2Jn 10-11). And the introduction of even the slightest error to the otherwise legitimate body of truth ensures that over time the whole batch will become thoroughly corrupted by such yeast (Mt 6:6-12).

Yet, the misguided efforts described above are undertaken and continue all around us in today's local "church." The folks behind them must believe that no harm is done, and the true effort to accomplish the work which God has delegated to the Church is not greatly hindered by the presence of false doctrine or partnering with anyone professing Christianity, no matter how unscriptural or nonexistent their doctrinal foundation. Of course, this flows from the ever-worsening condition of the modern "church" itself.

Obvious in its general absence from the contemporary local church is a mature grasp of scriptural doctrine among congregation and leadership alike. More basically - and beyond mere coincidence - evidence of the very presence of genuine spiritual rebirths goes begging. This is not to suggest that right doctrine and mature understanding pave the way to salvation; rather, they flow from it. Therefore, it is not surprising that churches filled with the merely religious are plagued with doctrinal ignorance and confusion; they lack the depth of insight which accompanies (results from) spiritual rebirth; they are simply unable to discern spiritual truth (1Co 2:12-14; Eph 1:15-18; Phil 1:9-11).

Although especially true in the slowly-dying mainline denominations, this has been evident for some time now in many “independent” and “evangelical” churches, as well. “Receive-and-believe” and other simplistic, incomplete or erroneous “gospels” are springing up all around. The necessary doctrines of repentance (Mk 1:4, 14-15; 6:12; Act 26:20b), obedience (Jn 14:15, 23a; 15:14; 1Jn 2:3-6; Jer 42:6a), personal holiness (1Pe 1:15-16; Eph 1:4; 1Co 1:2a; 2Co 7:1) and godly living (2Pe 3:11, 14; Tit 2:11-14; 1Th 4:3-5, 7) are being omitted or neglected. Additionally, the scriptural concepts of exhortation, admonishment, rebuke, correction, discipline, and even encouragement and affirmation - one of another - are also out of vogue, having given way to the secular adages: “mind your own business” and “it’s best not to get involved.”

But most telling is the prevailing notion in modern “Christendom” that we should either avoid muddying the waters with talk of being born again or conform to the more enlightened, contemporary view of it; that it is a rather simple matter, penciled into one’s calendar whenever one finds it convenient. God’s sovereign administration, Christ’s perfectly finished work of the cross, and the power and role of the Holy Spirit in regeneration have been eliminated; the supernatural components have been replaced with social religiosity, self-help feel-goodism, and counterfeit piety manufactured from ever-evolving human philosophy rather than true godliness rooted in obedient submission to a holy God. And all of that flows from and is being driven by mere “scholarly” psychobabble (theobabble).

Essentially, many professing Christians will just not allow themselves to be bothered with investigating doctrinal integrity. They fail to see its importance to and impact upon proper individual and corporate Christian practice. As long as the church lawn is mowed, the supper is staffed, the VBS is scheduled, the speaker for the mission conference is booked, and folks are getting along and having fun, then all is well!

To make matters worse, many church leaders themselves ignore, reject, distort or violate the doctrines ostensibly held in their own church charters, so that God’s order to identify and adhere to the truth appears to have been vacated. And though there are indeed those who have a proper knowledge and understanding of the truth, they shirk the duty of Pr 27:17 (“iron sharpening iron”), allowing rust and decay to set in.

There has developed within the modern Christian community an apparent lack of awareness or concern for the danger in putting the cause ahead of the One Whose cause it is. The excitement of some virtuous end is allowed to trump the

corrupted means employed in the process. Beside the obvious problems in all that, the goals being sought, along with the virtue ascribed to them, are merely the desires and estimation of men, not the plan and view of God.

This overall deprecation of the sanctity of truth and its solemn import - at best, to unwisely accommodate the convenience of the "work of God," or worse, as a calculated deception for personal profit - is, in actuality, the removal or disabling of the ultimate safeguard God has provided for us: knowledge of the truth (2Pe 1:3; Hos 4:6; 1Ti 2:4; 2Ti 2:25-26; Tit 1:1; Heb 10:26-27).

One small step in the direction of falsehood leads to many larger ones - and each false step makes it more difficult to find our way back to the truth. We cannot partner with the world and honor God at the same time (Jam 4:4; 1Jn 2:15-17; Mt 6:24). We cannot mingle the truth of God with worldly philosophies (Col 2:8; 2Co 6:14-16) and expect God to be pleased with us and to shower us with the abundant blessings reserved for His obedient children.

This has become an epidemic problem, a cancer slowly destroying the very fabric of modern Christendom. Ecumenism and coveted membership in the Council of Churches has led to worldly rather than godly social and political activism; the promoting and defending of philosophies and methods which are at odds with the scriptures and God's plan for His Church. This has drawn local churches away from God's agenda and true doctrine, to be redeployed in the cause of the liberal cultural agenda of the day, the ultimate goal of which is to enable folks to feel better about their sin - rather than to be rid of it!

The scriptures provide ample warning about false teachers and their teachings - from the lips of Jesus, and from the pen of every NT writer (Mt 7:15-20; 24:4-5; Gal 1:6-9; 2Co 11:13-15; 2Pe 2:1-3; 1Jn 4:1-6; 2Jn 10-11; Jude 3-4 and many more). It is time for us to make a serious and thorough examination of our held doctrine; to recognize the importance of employing the true doctrines of God alone as a sound and trustworthy foundation to guide our faith and practice.

Paul describes the formula for church sanity in Eph 4:11-16. If we are to enjoy functional health and vibrancy, proper developmental growth, and achievement and maintenance of individual and corporate norms (all according to God's view), we must be united in an accurate understanding of scriptural doctrine. Vs 13 speaks for itself: "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the

fullness of Christ.” Rom 15:5-6, 1Co 1:10 and the entire sense of scripture’s repetitive treatment of Christian unity emphasize this need unambiguously.

Finally, beyond mere unity in sound doctrine, we are called to *apply* it in our daily lives (Jam 1:22-25). Individually and corporately, if we are to be effective for God’s purposes (and our own ultimate best interests), we must work out - with godly wisdom - that which God has worked in (Phil 2:12; 2Pe 1:5-8). Our daily lives must be fashioned after the truths which God has graciously revealed to us (Ps 119 (all); Lk 11:28; 3Jn 3-4; Gal 1:15-16). By that same grace, He has given us a genuine love, an accurate understanding, and a godly excitement for Himself and the truth of His Word. We must each be striving to fulfill 2Ti 2:15. Together, we must be contending for the truth of the gospel (Phil 1:27; Jude 3).

(See “[We’re Saved ... Now What?](#)”)

In summary, agreement upon and application of true doctrine are critical to the spiritual health and development of the local and universal Christian Church toward the end of fulfilling the mission and responsibilities God calls us to. Without these, we fall prey to the natural human condition. This is why true Christians look around today and lament the state of what attempts to pass itself off as “Christianity.” And this also explains why it has become so difficult to minister saving truth to a world which, while desperately in need of the example and influence of true Christianity, witnesses instead a “Christianity” so corrupted and so far removed from true godliness - and God Himself - that its rejection as a moral and practical guide to righteous living should not surprise us at all.

Therefore, the first step in reaching the lost with the *true* truth is to separate ourselves from all the nonsense. To do so, we must first identify the truth ourselves - confident that it is indeed a true reflection of God’s Word. Then, we must maintain, as a top priority, a commitment to accurately represent it; in what we teach, yes, but especially in what we model (we must obey it ourselves - “Do as I say, not as I do” does not work!). To that end, we have the Holy Spirit’s assigned role in enabling us to do so (Jn 14:26; 16:7-11; 2Co 1:21-22). But we are also commanded and expected to draw upon the strength which doctrinal unity, like-mindedness and oneness of purpose among the body of Christ provides. It is time for the true Christian community to unite in truth, for our own best interests and the success of the work - for *God’s* sake, honor and glory!

And so, our doctrinal profession is detailed [below](#).

[Our Doctrinal Profession](#)

This proclamation seeks to avoid the following commonly-encountered errors:

We will not

Attempt to “impress” you with elite or unique views or “discoveries”
“Resolve” issues which are unsettled in scripture by supplying our opinion
“Create” doctrine in order to justify our predispositions
Issue unexplained, undeveloped, stand-alone, mere assertions of our position
Align ourselves with others at the expense of faithfulness to the scriptures

We will

Avoid the use of archaic or ambiguous language
Seek to be clear and complete in identifying our position
Provide logical and practical support consistent with the scriptural view
Provide scripture references which justify our position
Recognize our accountability to God for what we claim and teach as truth

Generally, we have limited this statement to assertion of our own held doctrine. The false doctrines and practices of others, particularly the Catholics, Mormons (LDS), Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the “plain communities” are too numerous and varied to satisfactorily explore in this context.

Next, note that the accurate representation of scriptural doctrine is not merely some academic exercise - true doctrine is the base for establishing godly principles to deal with all of life’s dilemmas. As Christians, this solid foundation of God’s Word must be the prevailing influence over the entirety of our everyday thinking and comportment; the driving force behind all our efforts, including our approach to the various social, political and economic issues of the day.

Thus, we are obligated - to ourselves and others - to specify the truths which govern us, to which we may be held accountable. We and others must know what we believe, upon which we will firmly stand. This foundation is our reliable, never-changing, agreed-upon base for guidance, self-correction and resolution of differences. It is also and ultimately our evangelism handbook.

Finally, we are able to draw upon these established, non-relative truths to fulfill our duty to whatever works God calls us to. We can be confident in our efforts when we have a right view of God and the teachings of His Word. When we are in right relationship with Him, with hearts properly submitted, we know that our

actions are sound because they are rooted in God and His Word; we are under His guiding influence and sovereign protection.

And when we allow God to lead us to the particular people and causes which He has, in His wisdom and for His purposes, chosen and prepared for us (Eph 2:10), we avoid searching for or chasing less worthy or unworthy causes - or those He has reserved for other Christians. The ideal is to be, as Jesus, in the center of God's will. In Jer 42:6, the remnant of God's people expressed this in model fashion: "Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, we will obey the LORD our God ... so that it will go well with us, for we will obey the LORD our God."

Jesus said it this way in Jn 4:34: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work." Jesus found his complete sustenance in nothing more than doing the will of the Father. As always, He models perfection for us.

Of course, when we obey God, it is always favorable for us, whether we think so or realize it or not. But in order for us to obey the Lord, the base of truth we stand upon must be solid ...

Therefore, founded upon the truths of scripture alone,

We believe, about ...

(Scroll through the document below or click on a topic to jump directly to it)

[The Scriptures](#)

[God](#)

[God's Sovereignty and Transcendency](#)

[Man and Sin](#)

[Salvation](#)

[The Eternal Security of Salvation](#)

[The Christian's Response to Salvation](#)

[Sanctification](#)

[The Resurrection and Return of Jesus](#)

[Eternal Life for Believers - Judgment for the Lost](#)

[The Universal Church and the Local church](#)

[Local Church Polity](#)

[Baptism and Communion](#)

[Christian Marriage and Family](#)

[Other Relevant Issues:](#)

[Homosexuality](#), [Birth Control](#), [Patriotism](#),
[Age of Accountability](#)

(“Believer” designates a true Christian; one who has experienced the new birth)

The Scriptures

The Old and New Testament scriptures consist of the 66 canonical books and are collectively, completely and exclusively the inspired Word of God. The original writings are inerrant, entirely true, eternally trustworthy and represent God’s complete revelation to mankind. They were written by men under the supernatural direction and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Being God-inspired is the overriding test of canonicity. Various practical tests, under God’s sovereign supervision, were applied to confirm each writing and to arrive at the final canon. As scripture itself testifies, the canon is now complete and closed.

Although God and His workings are evident in creation, though He additionally reveals Himself and His truths through the agency of the Holy Spirit, and though many folks may experience dreams, visions, “coincidences” and various other confirmations from God, the scriptures are the empirical standard by which all such perceived truths are either affirmed as true or denied as false.

Likewise, theological truths derived from scholastic and other endeavors are to be tested and proven against this unchanging, unfailing standard. There is not, has never been, nor ever will be any revelation which corrects, supersedes or augments in any way any portion of the pristine originals of the scriptures, however slight or insignificant the modification may seem from the view of man.

Any and all additional “revelation,” whether through modern “prophets,” “discoveries” of man (other than lost manuscripts of the inspired Word), new writings, modern theological, philosophical or other “breakthroughs,” or any other claim of new or corrective revelation from or of God violates scripture’s commands not to add to or take away from God’s inspired Word. Conflicts with scripture which are justified as “oral teachings,” “church tradition” or which are characterized in any other way are merely violations of scripture. Such conflicts are resolved by simply adopting the view of scripture. Any other course necessarily opens the door to an endless and irresolvable struggle among men in their futile attempt to wrest control of truth from one another - and from God.

The scriptures are the complete and final authority for Christian faith and practice. They reveal the principles by which men are to conduct themselves, individually and corporately, and by which all men will be individually judged by God. They provide the never-changing standard by which all attitudes and

behaviors are tested and proven. They also contain the complete and unfailing formula for true and effective godly unity to which all believers are called.

In a general sense, the following adage provides guidance: The Old Testament contains the prophecies of God, the Gospels report their fulfillment, and the New Testament writings supply the inspired interpretation. The believer's effort ought not to be so much applied to interpreting the scriptures as to attaining to a reasoned and common understanding of the interpretation God has provided.

God has made the scriptures available for the believer to read, study and meditate upon; to hide in his heart, to ever maintain on his mind and tongue, and to teach and otherwise pass along to others. Through this process the believer is enabled to mature in spiritual knowledge and discernment and to gain confidence and increased desire to apply their proper guidance to his life, that his conduct would be one means of witnessing to the truths of God's Word.

Ex 18:16; 19:7; 24:4; Dt 4:1-2, 5-6, 8-14, 40; 5:1, 32-33; 6:6-9; 11:18-20; 12:32; 17:18-19; 31:11-13; 32:45-47; Jos 8:34-35; 2Ki 23:1-3; Ezr 7:10; Neh 8:1-8, 12, 18; 9:3; Ps 18:30; 19:7-11; 119 (all); Pr 30:5-6; Ecc 12:9-13; Isa 8:20; 40:8; 55:11; Jer 15:16; 36 (all); Mt 5:17-19; 7:24-29; 22:29; 24:4-5, 35; Lk 10:25-26; 21:33; 24:25-27, 44-45; Jn 5:39; 10:34-35; 14:26; 16:13; 17:17; Act 1:16; 6:7; 8:30-31; 12:24; 17:11; 18:11; 19:10, 20; Rom 15:4; 16:17-18; 2Co 10:5; Eph 4:11-14; 5:6; 6:17; Col 1:25-26; 2:4, 8; 1Th 2:13; 1Ti 1:3-8; 4:13, 16; 6:3-5; 2Ti 3:14-17; 4:2-4; Tit 1:9; 2:1; Heb 1:1-2; 4:12; 13:9; Jam 1:22-25; 1Pe 1:23-25; 2Pe 1:19-21; 2:1-2; 3:15-16; 2Jn 10-11; Rev 1:3; 22:6-7, 18-19

God

There is one, and only one, living and true God; the Creator, Sustainer, Ruler and Judge of the entire universe and everything it contains. He alone has existed from eternity past, without beginning. He will exist for eternity future. He transcends time and space. Nothing can hinder, harm or overcome Him or His plans in any way whatsoever. He is infinitely powerful, perfect, pure, just, holy and good; all-sufficient, all-knowing, all-loving and all-wise; merciful, gracious, patient; unchangeable and unfathomable; the Source of all truth.

God is both spiritual and personal. He exists in three persons: the triunity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit - each with distinct personal attributes, yet without division as to nature, essence or being (a mystery sustained in scripture).

The Father is truly the Father to those, and only those, who truly believe; to those, and only those, who become His children through spiritual regeneration

and saving faith in Christ Jesus. While God is indeed the Creator of all, He is not the spiritual Father of all. Only those born again are God's spiritual children.

The Son, Jesus Christ, is fully and truly God and fully and truly man (scripture-taught, yet an unfathomable mystery to man). By Him and for Him, all things were created - and in Him all things consist. His designation in scripture as "firstborn" pertains to His preeminent status - an order of positional magnitude - not a chronological assignment necessitating His origin in time. In His human nature, He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He perfectly revealed and performed the will of the Father. He identified Himself completely with mankind, yet was without sin. He suffered and died on the cross - a perfect, vicarious sacrifice atoning for the sins of men - and was buried according to scripture. The Father's acceptance of this offering as satisfactory, complete and final is demonstrated and proven in Jesus' resurrection and ascension to Heaven, where He is now seated at the Father's right hand.

Christ Jesus is the one and only mediator between God and man. Through His work alone, by faith in that work alone, reconciliation of sinful man with the all-holy God is made possible and effected. He is the Head of the Church, figuratively presented in scripture as His body and bride. He will return in glory to judge the world and to reign forever as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Holy Spirit regenerates men unto spiritual life, bringing true conviction, godly sorrow, genuine repentance and eternal salvation to previously spiritually-dead sinners. He indwells reborn believers to guide, instruct, convict, correct, remind, comfort, encourage, enable, motivate, strengthen, protect and empower them for godly living and service. In the believer, He is the catalyst to understanding and application of truth and the development of Christian character conforming to the image of Christ. Believers are reliant upon the Holy Spirit's guidance and empowerment in all aspects of everyday life, however mundane, challenging and/or threatening.

The indwelling Holy Spirit is the believer's sure deposit; the seal guaranteeing the promises of God - especially and particularly his final glorification into God's presence in Heaven which the believer awaits but which God already sees. The Holy Spirit provides natural and supernatural gifts to be employed by each believer for the building up of the Church and for ministering reconciliation to the lost. The Holy Spirit's ongoing ministry is to glorify the Son, Jesus Christ.

Gen 1 (all); 2 (all); Ex 3:1-15; 6:2-3; 15:11; 20:1-7; Lev 11:45; Dt 6:4; 32:3-6; 1Sa 2:2; 1Ch 29:10-13; Job 11:7-9; Ps 2:7; 18:30-31; 31:19; 45:6; 51:11; 63:1; 83:18; 89:11-14; 90:2, 4; 93 (all); 95:1-7; 96 (all); 99:1-5; 104:1; 110:1, 4; 145:13, 17; 147:5; Pr 2:6; Isa 5:16; 6:1-5; 7:14; 9:6-7; 28:29; 30:18; 43:1, 3, 10, 13, 15; 45:5; 64:8; Jer 10:10; Dan 4:2-3; Joel 2:28-29; Mic 5:2; Mt 1:18-25; 3:11-17; 5:48; 6:9; 7:11; 8:29; 9:6; 11:25-27; 14:32-33; 16:15-17; 17:5; 23:9; Mk 1:1, 7-11; 3:11; 12:29-30; Lk 1:26-35; 3:15-16; 4:1, 17-21, 41; 11:13; 12:12; 22:66-71; Jn 1:1-18, 29-34; 4:21-26; 5:24-26, 36-40; 7:37-41; 8:42-47; 10:14-18, 30, 36-38; 11:25-27; 12:44-50; 14 (all); 15:26; 16:7-15, 25-32; 17:1-8, 20-26; 20:28-30; Act 1:5, 7; 2:1-36; 4:31; 5:30-32; 7:55-56; 8:14-17; 9:20-22; 10:36-44; 11:15-16; 13:52; 15:8; 17:2-3; 18:28; Rom 1:3-4, 20; 8:26-28; 9:7-8; 1Co 1:30-31; 2:10-14; 3:16; 6:19; 8:4-6; 2Co 1:21-22; 3:17-18; Gal 4:4-6; Eph 1:13-14; 2:13-22; 3:14-21; 4:6, 30; Phil 2:5-11; Col 2:9; 1Th 4:8; 1Ti 1:17; 2:5-6; 3:16; 6:15-16; 2Ti 1:14; Tit 2:13-14; Heb 1:1-12; 4:14; 7:14-28; 9:11-12, 15, 24-28; 12:2, 5-9; 13:8; Jam 1:13, 17; 1Pe 1:17; 2:21-25; 2Pe 1:21; 1Jn 1:1-3; 2:1-2; 3:1, 24; 4:7-16; 5:6-12, 20; Rev 1:8; 4:11; 5:9-14; 15:4; 19:16

God's Sovereignty and Transcendancy

God is sovereign over all. He alone created, sustains and rules the entire universe. He alone possesses the right, the authority and the power to order all things according to His pleasure. Since God transcends all, including man, there are various matters which cannot be reconciled to the satisfaction of man's limited intellectual capacity, including some scripture-taught truths.

The capabilities and boundaries of man's reason and logic are exceeded by the full understanding of God and His ways which man cannot achieve. Although God has unveiled solutions to various mysteries through progressive revelation (now completed), many remain and are unfathomable by human means and effort. Teaching which purports to "resolve" such mysteries will be nowhere found in scripture - and may actually be at odds with it. Whether or not intentionally designed to deceive or exploit, it can be assured that such teaching is a misguided effort of man. Man is not free, apart from negative consequence, to resolve for himself what God has chosen not to reveal.

(See "[The Transcendent Knowledge and Wisdom of God](#)")

(Module 14d of the study entitled, "[God's Plan of Salvation](#)")

Dt 3:24; 29:29; Jos 21:45; 23:14; Judg 13:17-18; 2Sa 7:28; Job 11:7-10; 28:12-28; 36:22-33; 37:1-13, 21-23; 42:1-2; Ps 2:1-4; 22:27-31; 33:6-19; 44:20-21; 47 (all); 103:19-22; 104:1-32; 115:3; 135:5-7; 138:8; 139 (all); Pr 15:3; 16:9; 19:21; Ecc 3:11; 7:13-14, 23-24; 8:16-17; 11:5; Isa 14:24, 26-27; 29:14-16; 40:10-41:4; 42:5, 8-9; 43:13; 45:5-12; 46:9-11; 48:3-7; 55:8-11; 64:8; Jer 16:17; 18:1-6; 27:5; 29:11; 33:3; Lam 2:17; 3:37-38; Eze 12:28; Dan 2:26-28; 4:17, 35; Joel 2:30-32; Mic 4:12; Mt 1:22; 11:25-26; 13:34-35; Lk 1:37; 5:1-26; 18:31; 24:44; Jn 3:1-10; 6:35-40; 10:27-29; 18:9; Act 17:24-26; Rom 8:28-39; 9:11-12, 20-21; 11:29, 33-36; 16:25-27; 1Co 2:6-16; 2Co 5:5, 18; Eph 1:4-5, 9-11; 3:8-11, 20-21; Phil 1:6; 4:7; 2Th 2:13; 1Ti 6:15-16; Tit 1:1-3; Heb 4:12-13; Jam 2:5; 1Pe 1:1-5; 1Jn 3:19-20; Jude 24-25; Rev 1:8; 3:8; 22:13

Man and Sin

Man is the crowning work of God's creation, made in God's own image as male and female and given dominion over the remainder of God's creation. However, the scriptures clearly and repeatedly teach that all men are sinners; conceived with a sin nature as a result of the fall in the Garden of Eden. After his creation in innocence, Adam fell into sin through Satan's temptation of Eve. As God had warned, this plunged him into spiritual death. Consequently, all men are physically conceived with a dead spirit nature (inherited from Adam) and are in need of reconciliation to God. All men require regeneration by the Holy Spirit in order to regain spiritual life and attain to salvation. Christ is the sole exception; He alone was without a sin nature and lived a sinless life.

Some argue against God's wisdom and right to include all mankind with Adam; that Adam should stand as the federal representative of all. Since God has provided the option to be identified and included with Christ instead, that protest is moot and its true basis is unmasked: sinful rebellion against God and the despising of His perfect solution - a solution involving unfathomable humiliation and suffering for His Son, Jesus Christ, and eventually costing Him His very life. God's sovereign reasoning and purpose cannot be fully known or understood. Rather than foolishly arguing the theory behind a portion of God's plan, unsaved man needs to avail himself of the full package. Doing so permanently removes his condemnation, granting him eternal life with God in Heaven.

Further rebellion against God and His [Plan of Salvation](#) is witnessed in the rejection of God's view of man and sin (including and especially sin's consequences), along with God's sovereign right and authority to dictate the sole resolution. It is of the utmost importance to the unsaved sinner's eternal well-being (and the saved sinner's enjoyment of his salvation) that his view be brought in line with what God has plainly revealed. Scripture describes the depravity of man and the nature of sin in extremely harsh terms. Recharacterizing these to allow man to feel better about himself provides a false sense of security and presents a grave spiritual risk. Furthermore, doing so deprecates the person and work of Christ in a futile attempt to mitigate or completely eliminate the need for His perfect, substitutionary sacrifice.

In his unregenerate state, man is totally depraved; he is incapable of avoiding sin or pleasing God. Man is conceived a sinner by nature; that is, he does not become a sinner as a result of sinning - he sins because he is a sinner at the very core of his being. Absent the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, man is an enemy of God in his own estimation and by his own choice. There is no man

who does not sin; no one who is able to satisfy God's perfect and righteous requirements for entrance into Heaven apart from Jesus Christ. All men are in need of salvation to avoid the just condemnation and wrath of God.

Regeneration by the Holy Spirit provides salvation, ensuring the sinner's redemption and reserving his place in Heaven for all eternity. No unrepentant, unregenerate, unsaved, reprobate sinner will gain entrance to Heaven. God cannot and will not co-exist with sin and sinners. If that were not so, Heaven would not be Heaven; it would quickly degenerate to become as evil and corrupt as the current world order. The saved sinner in Heaven will no longer be a sinner. His sin nature, and therefore the possibility of sinning (his very ability to sin), will be finally and permanently removed for and from him.

(See "[Sinners All](#)," "[God's Separation from Sin and Sinners](#)" and "[The Certain and Necessary Judgment of God](#)")
(Modules 1, 2 and 3 of the study entitled, "[God's Plan of Salvation](#)")

Gen 1:26-30; 2:7, 15-22; 3 (all); 6:5, 11-12; 8:21; 9:1-3, 6; Lev 11:45; Dt 7:10; 32:4; 1Sa 2:2; 1Ki 8:46; Job 15:14-16; 36:8-9; Ps 1:5-6; 5:4-6, 9-10; 8:3-8; 14:1-3; 18:30; 32:1-5; 36:1-4; 51:1-5; 99:5, 9; 143:2; 145:17; Pr 11:21; 14:14; 15:3; 16:5; 19:3; 20:9; 28:13; Ecc 3:15, 17; 7:20; 11:9; 12:14; Isa 6:3; 13:11; 48:8; 53:6; 59:2-16; 64:6-7; Jer 5:1-2; 16:12, 17; 17:9; Nah 1:3; Mal 3:16-4:1; Mt 3:10; 7:19; 13:40-43, 47-50; 25:46; 26:41; Mk 7:21-23; Lk 3:17; 8:17; 16:15, 26; Jn 2:24-25; 3:36; 5:28-28; 7:19; 8:24; Act 17:31; Rom 1:18-32; 2:1-5, 8-9; 3:9-20, 23; 5:6-8, 12, 18-19; 6:23; 7:18-25; 8:7-8, 13; 14:12, 23; 1Co 4:5; 6:9-10; 15:21-22; 2Co 5:10; 11:3; Gal 3:22; 5:19-21; Eph 5:5; Col 1:21; 2Th 1:8-9; 1Ti 2:14; Heb 4:13, 15; 7:26; 9:27; 10:26-31; 12:14; Jam 1:13-15; 3:9; 1Pe 1:15-16; 2:22; 4:5; 2Pe 2:9; 1Jn 1:8, 10; 3:5; 5:19; Rev 4:8; 15:4; 20:15; 21:8, 27

Salvation

Prior to spiritual rebirth, every man stands condemned for his sin and awaits with certainty the wrath of God's judgment. The scriptures clearly state that the sinner's hope to gain entrance to Heaven requires that he be born again. This rebirth speaks of the sinner's spiritual nature, not a physical rebirth. All men are physically conceived with a dead spirit nature (due to Adam's sin). The rebirth commanded in scripture pertains to the need for this spirit nature to attain to life once again. This regeneration is exclusively the work and role of the Holy Spirit.

Regeneration is a one-time, instantaneous event - not an ongoing process. It is a supernatural work of God; it cannot be attained through scholastic endeavor, pious living, self-discipline or any philanthropic, sacrificial or other effort the world may deem virtuous. The "social gospel" being offered today is unavailing for salvation; it is merely a tool employed by those seeking to advance a liberal

social agenda. Any “gospel” which neglects or omits the requirement to be born again, the absolute necessity of the cross, the supernatural role and power of the Holy Spirit, true repentance, godly obedience enabled by the freely-received gift of faith, and the other requisite scriptural elements is no gospel at all.

Unregenerate man has no hope of redemption through any method, system or performance of his own. However, God has designed, revealed, implemented and completed a plan providing salvation for all who will believe. The integrity and assurance of the conditions, promises and efficacy of God’s plan are affirmed in Jesus’ resurrection. In fact, the very opportunity for salvation is only made possible through Jesus’ perfect, vicarious sacrifice - stamped with the imprimatur of God Himself: the subsequent seating of Christ at His right hand.

Salvation cannot be conferred by religious officials applying criteria and/or ritual of their own making or choosing; it is granted by God alone - in accordance with His grace and mercy, because of His great love. God demonstrates this love by effecting salvation in the sinner while he is spiritually dead; lost in sin; a wicked enemy of God. God’s grace grants sinners what they do not deserve (justification; eternal life in Heaven) while His mercy withholds what they do deserve (condemnation; eternal suffering in Hell).

Scripture clearly teaches that salvation is entirely of God; by His grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone; in no way nor to the smallest degree reliant upon works (good deeds), observance of any man-made traditions, rituals, laws or religious rules, or family lineage. That is, the very faith through which salvation is obtained is itself a gift from God by His grace, to be freely received.

There is only one [Plan of Salvation](#); only one way to be saved; through One only. There is no provision for sympathy or special consideration for “sincerely” following any of the myriad false worship systems (religions) or other methods invented by man. Indeed, the fact that Christian doctrine assigns to eternity in Hell all who leave this life as non-Christians is a common and passionately-offered protest (especially as that impacts “good” folks or the entirety of those who place their faith in one of the false religions the world deems suitable). This protest seeks to target Christians as intolerant, non-inclusive bigots.

Refutation of these protests is simply that Christians do not and cannot relegate anyone to Hell; God alone possesses the authority and power to set and enforce the terms of salvation. And He alone knows for certain who has met them and who has not. But His Word takes great and gracious care to make

these terms known and to provide dire warnings and clear explanations of the consequences for missing what He has made plainly evident. Man is left without excuse.

And so, salvation is attained only on God's terms. The sinner must be brought, generally and specifically, to a realization of the sin and sinful desires in himself; he must fall under a true conviction of his sinfulness (recognizing and assessing it from God's view). Until he is convinced that he is a sinner and understands the actual nature of sin and its offense to a holy God, he will neither see a need for nor hold any meaningful interest in a Savior. But righteous conviction will lead to godly sorrow, genuine repentance, authentic faith and personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Master - all of which flows from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, permanently restoring spiritual life.

As with false religion above, the pursuit of righteousness and salvation through the keeping of the Law or on the basis of works is futile. Prior to justification, every man stands condemned before God - unable to defend or redeem himself. For it is impossible for any man to perfectly (or anywhere close to perfectly) keep the Law. Therefore he has no hope to avoid God's righteous accusation and condemnation through his own best effort to keep the Law.

And no work or body of works - apart from or in addition to the finished work of the cross - can be offered to God as propitiation of His judgment and wrath against sin; this is an insult to God and His plan, and a spitting upon the person and work of Christ. If a man is to be justified and saved, it must be accomplished through means other than Law or works.

Still, God's plan does provide for good works - but they necessarily flow from, rather than lead to salvation. Such works are designed by God to accomplish the purpose of His Church, not to attain salvation for the doer. Good works are the expected evidence and outworking of genuine, saving faith - in no way adding to, perfecting or maintaining the salvation of the believer. They are not the means to attain salvation initially, nor do they somehow provide for salvation's maintenance afterward. Any salvation requirements satisfied by such works are merely the imagined or manufactured requisites of men.

The shed blood of Christ provides the sole basis of atonement for the believer's sin, completely propitiating God's judgment and wholly justifying the sinner before God. Although the word "pardon" is often offered as a description of what God does for the saved sinner, redemption achieves much more than a

mere “pardon” which releases a man only from the penalty for past offenses. In justification, God obligates Himself to view the believer as righteous for all eternity; all his past, current and future sins are paid for. And Christ was, is and will always be the only One qualified and able, in perfect obedience to the Father, to have accomplished this work of redemption on behalf of the believer.

In salvation, the believer is fully justified; seen by God as clothed in the righteousness of Christ; holy and blameless; without blemish. God determines and promises to regard the believer as His very own righteous child from this point forward. But this righteousness is not in or of the believer; it is the very righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer on the basis of his saving faith.

It is not that the believer is no longer an unworthy sinner; that he is now, in actual practice, righteous - but God sovereignly chooses to eternally position and view the believer in this manner; as though he had never sinned. God retains His integrity, holiness, justice and righteousness in allowing Himself this choice because it is predicated upon the unfathomable merit of Christ and His atoning work, not the saved sinner’s own worthiness or anything he might be able to offer on his own behalf. In the end, it is simply impossible to fully grasp the prodigious nature of Christ’s accomplishment on behalf of the believer.

Finally, God’s choice to grant salvation to the believer is permanent; [eternal](#). Yet, though the spirit nature has been reborn, the sin nature remains. Thus, he will still sin. Nevertheless, salvation provides the believer with a permanent, secure position vis-à-vis God’s ultimate judgment to come. His relationship with God and his place in God’s kingdom is fixed; secured forever. As Jesus’ sacrifice effected salvation’s availability to all mankind once for all, regeneration by the Holy Spirit secures the individual believer’s redemption once for all.

By way of further clarification, Jesus’ current role as the believer’s advocate and intercessor before the Father is not to argue in the believer’s defense; that he is somehow innocent or has some legal right to sin and, therefore, ought to be free from condemnation. On the contrary, Jesus freely agrees with the Father regarding the believer’s guilt and the punishment he deserves. What Jesus did was to stand in for the believer, accepting the believer’s punishment in Himself!

Although the believer’s sin deserves eternal punishment, Christ is so worthy and His work of atonement so unfathomably profound and utterly complete that nothing more could be gained in the application of any further penalty for the believer’s sin. No punishment of the believer himself, no suffering of any kind to

any extent could satisfy God's righteous requirements relative to his sin even one iota more than that which Christ's substitutionary sacrifice has already accomplished! No believer need spend the smallest fraction of one second in punishment of any kind; it would be utterly meaningless and would achieve absolutely nothing from God's view! More importantly, any need for suffering or punishment of any sort by any saved sinner would violate God's Word which clearly teaches that Christ has *fully* paid the debt for the believer's sins, that He has *permanently* removed his sin, and that He has done so *once for all!* The blasphemous invention and teaching of purgatory by the Catholic church is the prime violation of this teaching of scripture.

Ultimately, salvation involves an eternal, intimate, personal relationship with the one true God of all, through and only because of Christ's perfect sacrifice, solely by the Holy Spirit's exclusive power. God grants the believer the right to be called, and to actually be, His child. Jesus is not ashamed to call him His brother, and the Holy Spirit makes His home in him.

(See "[God's Salvation Plan](#)," "[True Repentance](#)," "[Only One Way](#)," "[The Gift of God](#)" and "[God's Sovereign Choice in Salvation](#)")
(Modules 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the study entitled, "[God's Plan of Salvation](#)")

Gen 3 (all); 6:5, 11-12; 15:6; Dt 4:2; 6:13-14; 10:17; 12:32; Jos 24:15; 1Ki 8:48; 2Ch 7:14; Job 15:14-16; 17:3; 34:33; 36:8-12; Ps 1:5-6; 5:4-12; 14:1-3; 16:11; 25:14; 32:1-7; 34:22; 36:1-4; 49:7-8; 51:1-17; 67:1-2; 98:1-2; 130:3-4, 7-8; 143:2; Pr 3:11-12; 11:21; 14:14; 16:5; 19:3; 20:9; 28:13; 30:6; Ecc 3:17; 7:20; 12:11-12; Isa 13:11; 40:1-5; 43:10-12; 45:19, 22; 48:8; 49:6; 53 (all); 55:6-7; 59 (all); 60:1; 61:1-3; 64:6-7; Jer 5:1-3; 16:12; 17:9; Eze 14:6; 18:23, 27-28, 30-32; 33:11; Hos 11:4-5; Jon 2:8-9; Nah 1:3; Mal 3:16-4:1; Mt 1:21-22; 3:1-2, 8-9; 4:9-10, 17; 5:20, 45; 7:13-14, 21-23; 8:37; 11:20; 12:30; 16:21; 17:9, 22-23; 18:12-14; 20:17-19; 21:32; 25:46; 26:28; 27:62-66; 28:1-15; Mk 1:4, 14-15; 2:15-17; 6:12; 7:6-13, 21-23; 10:45; 16:16; Lk 1:68-69, 77-78; 2:10-11, 28-32; 3:1-6, 15-18; 5:30-32; 7:48-50; 9:22; 13:1-5; 16:27-31; 18:9-14; 19:10; 24:1-8, 13-15, 33-48, 50-51; Jn 1:9-14, 16-18, 29; 2:18-21; 3:3-18, 36; 5:20-21, 24, 28-29, 39-47; 6:28-29, 35-40, 44, 47, 51, 57, 65, 68-69; 7:19; 8:12, 24, 51-53; 10:7, 9-11, 16, 27-29; 11:25-27; 12:46; 14:6, 16-17, 28-28; 17:3; 19:28-30; 20:18-20, 31; 21:1-14; Act 1:3, 8-9, 21-22; 2:21, 32, 36-38; 3:15-16, 19; 4:2, 10, 12, 33; 5:30-32; 7:39; 10:34-35, 39-40, 43; 11:18; 13:24, 29-39; 14:15; 15:1-11; 16:29-31; 17:2-3, 18, 30-31; 19:4; 20:21; 23:6; 26:8, 20, 22-23; Rom 1:1-4, 16-20; 2:1-5, 11, 25-29; 3:9-28; 4 (all); 5 (all); 6 (all); 7 (all); 8:1-17, 28-39; 9:16, 20, 30-33; 10:3-13; 11:5-6; 14:9; 16:25-27; 1Co 1:4, 26-31; 2:9-10; 3:11, 16; 6:9-11, 14, 19-20; 8:6; 9:6-8; 15:1-8, 10, 12-22, 29-32; 2Co 1:21-22; 4:14; 5:14-21; 6:18; 7:9-10; 8:9; 9:15; Gal 1:1, 3-4; 2:15-21; 3 (all); 4:4-7; 5:4-6, 13, 16-18, 22-25; 6:15; Eph 1:4, 7-10, 19-20; 2 (all); 3:11-12; 4:30; 5:1, 25-27; Phil 2:5-12, 14-15; 3:3-9; Col 1:13-14, 19-22; 2:12-15; 3:1, 11; 1Th 1:9-10; 4:13-14; 2Th 1:8-9; 2:10; 1Ti 1:8, 15-16; 2:3-6; 2Ti 1:9-10, 14; 2:8, 19, 25; Tit 2:11-14; 3:3-7; Heb 1:1-3; 2:3-4, 9, 11, 17; 3:3, 12; 4:2-3, 15; 5:9; 7:11, 18-19, 25, 27; 8:1; 9:11-13, 15, 22, 24-28; 10:1-4, 10-14, 18; 11 (all); 12:5-7, 25; 13:12, 20-21; Jam 2:10, 14, 17; 1Pe 1:3-5, 18-21, 23-25; 2:22, 24-25; 3:18, 21; 2Pe 1:1; 3:9;

1Jn 1:1-3, 8-10; 2:1-2, 12; 3:1, 5, 24; 4:9-10, 13-15; 5:1, 10-13, 19; Jude 24; Rev 1:5; 3:21; 4:11; 5:2-5, 9-10; 9:20; 14:5; 16:8-11; 22:18-19

The Eternal Security of Salvation

Once attained, salvation cannot be lost, rejected or “walked away from” (abandoned). Click here ([Eternal Security](#)) for a thorough treatment of this scriptural doctrine. In short, salvation is necessarily permanent because it contains its own security guarantee as an inseparable inherency. The effectual work of God in the heart, mind and soul of a saint is supernaturally powerful, producing eternal, unfathomably profound changes which cannot be undone.

Beyond that, God pledges to guarantee the believer’s salvation Himself and provides the indwelling Holy Spirit as a deposit to both demonstrate and ensure the certainty of His pledge. The position enjoyed by the saved is impenetrable; it is eternally secure because God provides for it, promising to keep and guard it by His own omnipotent power. And that position is anchored in Christ Himself!

Those who reject this doctrine wrongly accuse it of granting a license to sin; allowing the saved to engage in debaucherous living with impunity. This and other attempts to refute this teaching are addressed at the link above.

Allowing salvation to be lost requires the believer to assume an unspecifiable measure of responsibility and to possess the very capability to satisfy some portion of his own sin debt or otherwise propitiate God’s judgment against himself. But the believer’s sin debt was completely satisfied in the atonement of the cross, and God requires no further satisfaction (nor will He or can He accept anything the believer might offer). Since sin is the sole cause of spiritual death, and since scripture plainly teaches that the perfect, substitutionary sacrifice of Christ completely removes the believer’s sin - once for all; forever - it is impossible to return to a state of spiritual death; that is, to lose salvation.

Finally, this is not a doctrine about which believers can or should “agree to disagree.” A common understanding and like-mindedness concerning this issue is critical for two reasons: First, it shapes the effort and mindset of Christians as they endeavor to live the holy lives God calls them to. Second, it dictates strategy in the Christian’s approach, response and relationship to both non-believers and fellow believers alike. In any case, the doctrine of [Eternal Security](#) must eventually be addressed with and understood by the maturing believer. It is neither irresolvable nor unimportant.

1Pe 1:3-5 is a great and succinct summary (a genuine example of a legitimate “proof text” - and see also, Heb 10:19-22a), but the [referenced posting](#) provides overwhelming scriptural support, logically develops the various issues, and addresses the controversies surrounding this doctrine with reasoned argument.

The Christian’s Response to Salvation

Once saved, the believer is responsible to live in consistent obedience to God’s Word through the gift of faith he has received. What he once was, and what he has now become in Christ, must and will be in sharp contrast. This contrast will be seen in the believer’s radically different view of God, himself and others, altered choices of social activities and personal associations, adjusted mindset for determining the value and priority of all things and for responding to the events of daily life, newfound excitement for spending time in God’s Word with the goal of understanding and applying it, acquired appreciation for fellowship with other believers, building desire to grow and mature in godliness, and wholehearted commitment to the work God assigns to believers, and more.

Though the new believer will struggle and encounter suffering and failure, he should not see this as a burden. He will be motivated to please God when he has a proper appreciation and gratitude for what God has done for him, along with the assurance of what awaits him. He has been newly created; he is now eternally secure in Christ, guarded and led by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Born again, having believed and trusted God for salvation, the believer accepts Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord and Master (Jesus cannot be Savior if He is not also Lord and Master). God’s glory and honor will be his primary concern. As God’s servant, the believer’s life will bear good fruit and attract others to God. True believers ought to be characterized by unity of doctrine and purpose, mutual love, common hope, cheerful discharge of Christian duties, discipleship (one of another), faithful evangelism, social responsibility, and much more.

God is the Source of all blessing. A believer should exhibit thankfulness and gratitude in all circumstances. God has made no promises regarding temporal provision; His promises consist in the supernatural and eternal. A believer who maintains an eternal focus will overcome whatever suffering he may encounter due to an absence of temporal provision and comfort. God is not obligated to the believer for anything but the greatest desire and provision he can hope for - eternal salvation; peace and joy in the presence of God in Heaven forever. Food, clothing and shelter are often proposed as basic obligations of God to man, but He has not even guaranteed the believer his next breath or heartbeat.

Still, in His sovereign goodness and grace, God does indeed pour out various and abundant blessings upon His children (and all others) in this life. The believer is to employ great and sober care in the stewardship of these provisions. They are to be managed wisely and prudently while being liberally employed for God's purposes. A true believer cheerfully gives of his God-given time, talents and possessions to further the cause of Christ. The godly works to which the believer is called (or which he happens to "find" in his path) provide a strong indication as to how the blessings he has received should be put to use.

All believers share a common, scripture-defined, God-commanded commission; all have been given the ministry of reconciliation, appointed as Christ's ambassadors to bring the message of reconciliation to all who are in need. As the believer himself has been reconciled to God, he is obligated to the effort to persuade others to likewise be reconciled to Him.

Believers ought to seek and recognize opportunities for outreach to various segments among the lost. Effective evangelization involves both spreading the Word and tending to temporal needs and care. Temporal provision is often the bridge to personal relationship which then allows for more effective sharing of the gospel's message of reconciliation to God.

The believer is to conduct himself responsibly regarding citizenship and societal endeavors. He is to submit himself to governmental authority and law whenever doing so does not cause conflict with God's Word. He ought to assist in worthy societal efforts as God leads, when such efforts further the cause of Christ - even if only to establish personal relationships which may hold the possibility of providing a platform for sharing God's Word.

(See "[Before and After](#)," "[Christian Maturity](#)"
and "[We're Saved!!! ... Now What?](#)")

(Modules 12, 14 and 15 of the study entitled, "[God's Plan of Salvation](#)")

Gen 12:1-3; 14:20; Ex 19:5-6; Lev 18:4; 20:7-8; 27:30-32; Dt 4:5-6; 5:32-33; 6:17-18; 8 (all); 26:16; 27:26; 30:14; 32:45-47; 1Ki 2:3; Ps 1:1-2; 37:4; 119 (all); 133:1; Pr 1:15; 3:5-6; 4:14-15; 12:26; 13:20; 14:7; 21:16; 23:19-21; 24:1, 21; Isa 6:1-8; 48:17-19; Jer 42:6; Mal 3:8-12; Mt 4:19-20; 5:16, 33-37; 6:1-4, 19-21, 23; 7:24-27; 9:37-38; 10:5-15; 12:50; 13:18-30, 37-44; 16:19, 24-26; 17:5; 22:9-10, 15-21, 35-40; 23:23; 24:14; 25:14-29; 28:18-20; Mk 1:20; 8:36-37; 16:15; Lk 1:38; 5:5, 27-28; 6:46-47; 8:21; 9:23; 10:1-18; 11:28; 12:15-21, 42; 14:26-27, 33-35; 16:1-13; 24:46-53; Jn 6:27; 8:11, 31; 13:17, 34-35; 14:11-12, 15, 21, 23, 26; 15:7-8, 12, 14, 16; 16:1; 17:15; 18:37; 20:21-22; Act 1:5, 8; 2 (all); 3:22-23; 4:19; 5:1-11, 29; 8:26-40; 10:42-48; 13:2-3; 17:24-25; 20:35; Rom 1:5; 2:13; 6:4-22; 7:6; 8:5-16; 10:13-15; 12:1-2, 5,

10-11; 13:1-7, 11-14; 15:13; 1Co 4:1-2; 6:9-11, 19-20; 12 (all); 15:33; 16:1-4; 2Co 3:18; 5:9, 17-21; 6:14-16; 7:1; 8 (all); 9 (all); 10:5; 12:15; Gal 1:10; 5:16-17; 6:7-8; Eph 2:10; 3:1-11; 4:1-10, 22-24; 5:3-4, 8, 15-17; Phil 1:27; 2:12-13; 3:7-8; 4:8, 10-19; Col 1:10, 21-22; 2:6-7, 19; 3:1-2, 5-8, 15-17, 23-24; 4:5-6; 1Th 1:3, 8; 2:13; 4:7; 5:5-6, 23-24; 2Th 3:6, 14; 1Ti 6:6-14, 17-19; 2Ti 1:9; 2:15, 20-22; 3:14; 4:5; Tit 2:11-12; 3:1, 3-4, 8, 14; Heb 2:1-3; 3:1; 4:14; 5:11-6:1; 10:14, 23; 11:39-12:2, 28; 13:5; Jam 1:21-26; 2:12; 3:9-10; 4:4, 7-8, 17; 5:12; 1Pe 1:1-2, 13-14, 18-19; 2:1, 4-12; 3:1, 8; 4:10; 2Pe 1:5-8; 3:11; 1Jn 1:6-7; 2:3-6, 15-17, 28; 3:16-18, 21-24; 4:7-21; 5:1-3; 2Jn 6; Rev 2:4-5; 22:17

Sanctification

Sanctification begins at salvation and is an ongoing process for the remainder of the believer's physical life, whereby he is being perfected; made holy; conformed to the image of Christ; set apart unto God for His use and purpose. It is not a one-time, completed event either at salvation or, as some maintain, some subsequent "second work of grace" or "baptism of the Holy Spirit," after which the believer leads a sinless life. The believer is not truly and completely sanctified and sinless until his glorification in Heaven.

It is God's will that the believer should be sanctified. This should be the believer's desire as well. God performs the work of sanctification in the believer according to and by His power; the believer must be willing and cooperate. Ultimately, as in all interaction of God's responsibility with man's, a complete understanding of all the elements and aspects of sanctification is not possible.

Sanctification is effected through the ministry of the in-dwelling Holy Spirit, who directs and equips the believer, providing him with wisdom and spiritual discernment enabling him to live a godly life (though imperfectly, due to the presence and influence of the believer's remaining sin nature). The Word of God actively works in the believer as the Holy Spirit teaches, reminds, corrects, strengthens, comforts, encourages, protects and opens his mind and heart to spiritual truth and understanding. The evidence that this process is ongoing in the believer is the fruit of the Holy Spirit being produced.

(See "[After Salvation: Sanctification](#)")

(Module 13 of the study entitled, "[God's Plan of Salvation](#)")

Lev 20:7-8; Mt 3:8; 5:48; 7:16-20; 12:33; Lk 6:43-45; Jn 15:4-5, 8, 16; 17:17-19; Rom 7:4; 12:1-2; 15:16; 1Co 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2Co 3:18; 7:1; Gal 5:16-25; Eph 1:4; 4:22-24; 5:25-27; Phil 1:9-11; 2:12-13; Col 1:9-10; 1Th 2:13; 4:3-7; 5:23-24; Tit 2:11-14; Heb 2:11; 3:1; 4:12; 10:10-14; 12:1-2; 13:12; 1Pe 1:15-16; 2:2; 2Pe 1:5-8; 3:14; 1Jn 1:7-10; 3:2; Jude 1, 24-25; Rev 22:11

The Resurrection and Return of Jesus

After His atoning death on the cross, Jesus was bodily resurrected and appeared to numerous of His disciples and others on several occasions over a 40 day period, including over 500 at one event. He then ascended into Heaven. Having completed the work required to make possible the salvation of sinners, He is now seated at the right hand of the Father. He lives forever as the High Priest and Advocate for all believers, interceding with the Father on their behalf.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus predicted that He would be resurrected after His death and would ascend to Heaven from where He had come. He will return for believers to bring them to a home He has prepared and reserves for them in Heaven. The lost will be judged for their sin and condemned to Hell for eternity since they have not availed themselves of God's [Plan of Salvation](#).

The historical record, witnessed proof and scriptural teaching of Jesus' resurrection and ascension are overwhelming and undeniable. The significance of these events was immediately recognized and disseminated - by His disciples and even many of those who had previously rejected Him and His teachings. The scriptures present the resurrection as validation of the remainder of Jesus' claims and teachings. His return is yet to occur.

(See "[The Resurrection of Jesus](#)")

(Module 4a of the study entitled, "[God's Plan of Salvation](#)")

No one knows the time of Jesus' return, but scripture indicates that it is imminent. Sin, evil, wars, pestilence of all sorts, false teaching of various types, rebellion against and rejection of God, and many other trials will intensify until all things are brought under the complete jurisdiction of God's final judgment. Believers are instructed to be prepared and to conduct themselves accordingly.

Ps 72:8; 90:3-4; 91:7; Isa 2:4; 11:4-5, 9; 26:19; Dan 12:2; Mt 16:21, 27; 17:9, 22-23; 18:8-9; 19:28; 20:17-19; 24:27, 30, 36, 42, 44; 25:13, 31-46; 26:64; 27:52-53, 62-66; 28:1-17; Mk 8:38; 9:43-48; 13:32-33; 16:6, 11-14, 19; Lk 1:32; 9:22; 12:40, 48; 16:19-26; 17:22-37; 21:27-28; 23:43; 24:1-8, 13-15, 25-27, 30-31, 33-48, 50-51; Jn 2:18-22; 5:20-21, 28-29; 10:14-18; 11:25-26; 14:1-3, 28-29; 20:9, 18-20, 24-28; 21:1-14, 22-23; Act 1:3, 8-11, 21-22; 2:32; 3:15-16; 4:2, 10, 33; 5:30-32; 10:39-40; 13:29-37; 17:2-3, 18, 31-32; 23:6; 26:8, 22-23; Rom 1:1-4; 4:23-25; 6:4-5, 9; 7:4; 8:11, 23, 34; 10:9; 14:9-10; 1Co 4:5; 6:14; 15 (all); 2Co 1:9; 4:14; 5:10, 15; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:19-20; 2:6; Phil 1:27; 3:20-21; 4:20; Col 1:5, 10, 13; 2:12; 3:1, 4; 1Th 1:10; 2:12; 4:13-18; 5:1ff; 2Th 1:7ff; 2 (all); 1Ti 2:5; 3:8, 11, 15; 4:16; 6:14; 2Ti 2:8, 15; 4:1, 8; Tit 2:11-14; Heb 1:3; 2:17; 5:9; 7:24-25; 8:1; 9:24, 26-28; 10:12; 12:2; 13:20-21; Jam 5:8; 1Pe 1:3-4, 21; 3:21-22; 2Pe 2:9; 3:3ff; 1Jn 2:1, 18, 28; 3:2; 3Jn 6; Jude 14; Rev 1:7-8, 18; 3:3, 11, 21; 12:10; 20:1-22:20

Eternal Life for Believers - Judgment for the Lost

All of the dead will be bodily resurrected; the believer to eternal blessing, peace and joy with God in Heaven; the non-believer to judgment and everlasting punishment in Hell. There is no provision for “opting out” of God’s plan to participate in an alternate choice. Annihilation, whereby someone is completely erased from existence so as to experience neither Heaven nor Hell, is not an option. Neither is the notion that the dead in sin may simply return to the ground or otherwise cease to consciously exist spiritually. God will and must judge (punish; condemn) sin. His perfect justice must be satisfied (propitiated). God has made these truths known, along with the truth about Himself and His [Plan of Salvation](#). Those who reject His offer of salvation are without excuse.

Gen 18:25; Dt 7:10; 1Sa 2:10; 2Sa 7:16; Ps 1:5-6; 9:8; 37:13; 50:6; 72:7-8; 96:13; Pr 11:19, 21; 14:14; 15:3; 16:5; Ecc 3:15, 17; 11:9; 12:14; Isa 9:6-7; 13:11; 26:19; Jer 16:17; Eze 18:4; Dan 12:2-3; 7:22-27; Mic 5:2; Nah 1:3; Mal 3:16-4:1; Mt 3:10; 7:19; 13:30, 40-43, 47-50; 19:29; 24:35; 25:31-46; Mk 9:43-48; 10:30; 16:16; Lk 1:32-33; 3:17; 8:17; 16:15, 19-31; 18:30; 20:27-38; 21:22; Jn 3:15-18, 36; 5:24-29; 6:40, 47; 8:24; 10:28; 11:21-27; 12:48; 14:1-6; Act 1:10-11; 13:48; 17:30-31; Rom 1:18-32; 2:1-16; 6:1-8, 22-23; 8:11, 13, 17; 9:28; 14:7-12; 1Co 4:5; 15:12-58; 2Co 5:10; Gal 6:8; Col 3:6, 25; 1Th 4:13-18; 2Th 1:5-10; 2:8; 1Ti 1:16; 6:19; Tit 2:13; 3:3-7; Heb 4:13; 9:27-28; 10:26-31; 1Pe 4:5; 2Pe 2:9; 1Jn 2:25; 59-13; Jude 14-15, 21; Rev 6:15-17; 19 (all); 20:4-6, 11-15; 21:8, 27; 22:1-15

The Universal (invisible) Church and the Local (visible) church

The universal (invisible) Church is comprised of all those, living and dead, who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and are thus united in the Body of Christ. The Head of the true Church is Christ Himself. There are no unsaved persons in the universal Church.

The local (visible) church is an assembly of area community folks who may or may not actually be saved or even profess to be saved. If the church is a properly-functioning, genuine Christian church, then those in leadership must be born again, and a significant portion of its congregation will be, also.

Genuine believers are called to unity, since they are each members of the One Body which is Christ Himself. Jesus prayed fervently for unity among believers, just as the unity He Himself enjoys with the Father. Thus, the local church must seek to reflect the ideal of the true universal Church; there must be an absence of divisions - it must strive for like-mindedness, common doctrine and agreed-upon godly purpose among its members.

(See [“The Measure of a Church”](#))

In God's view, no one is included or excluded from the universal Church on the basis of race/ethnicity, color, nationality, social class, education level, position of power or any other demographic division or individual status or achievement. Anyone who is born again is a member of the one true, universal Church; those who are not born again are not. Those who are in Christ, who have the Son, have eternal life; those who are not in Christ do not.

The local church is the extended family of each Christian individual and family of which it is comprised. On one hand, one element of proper local church functionality is to model familial principles for adoption by the growing families within it; on the other, its existing mature Christian families are a significant portion of the local church's backbone. To this end, local church elders are to be godly models of proper shepherding, counseling, discipline, compassion, love, mastery of God's Word and all other requirements of family leadership.

The local church will naturally include Christians who are part of families which are not wholly saved, along with those whose saved family members reside in other Christian communities. There must be a palpable sense of a true and intimate family bond among all those of the local congregation who, first and foremost, belong to each other in Christ.

A properly-functioning local church will attend to the following and more:

- Teaching/learning/studying the scriptures so as to instill mature understanding, confidence of conviction and enthusiastic application
- Fellowshiping in Christ so as to build meaningful, lasting relationships of mutual trust, fostering true co-membership in God's spiritual family
- Discipling one another so as to sharpen one another for whatever requires individual and corporate attention on God's behalf
- Witnessing to the lost in families, workplaces, communities and beyond
- Worshiping God together in various ways which please Him and which strengthen the bond that all members have together in Him
- Mutual encouragement, correction, edification, concern, compassion and love - one member for another
- Mutual sharing and accountability between all members

The local church must recognize the need to maximize its strength and effectiveness through genuine unity. Christians are clearly outnumbered and overwhelmed by the world's forces and numerous false worship systems. The Church must take full advantage of the multiplied strength and productivity

which results from the unity God calls believers to. Ever mindful of what Christ has done for it, the local church must be motivated to serve and obey Him fearlessly. Ultimately, the Church may rest in confidence that the power within it is greater than the power without; the plan God has *for* it overcomes the plans *against* it. It should not be operating without influence upon the world around it.

Dt 10:17; Ps 133:1; Pr 27:17; Ecc 4:9-12; Mt 8:11-12; 16:18; 18:15-20; 28:18-20; Mk 3:13-19; 6:7; Lk 3:18; 24:45-47; Jn 1:35-51; 3:36; 13:34-35; 17:14-26; Act 1:7-8; 2:41-47; 4:32; 6:1-7; 10:34-35; 11:22-24; 14:27; 15:1-36; 16:5, 40; 20:1, 7, 28; Rom 1:12; 2:11; 3:22; 10:12; 12:1-8, 10; 14:19; 15:2, 5-7, 14; 1Co 1:2, 10; 3:11, 16-17; 4:17; 5:11; 10:17; 11:24-26; 12 (all); 14:12; 2Co 1:3-7; 5:11-21; 7:6-7; 13:11; Gal 3:28-29; 5:6; 6:1-2, 5, 15; Eph 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:1-6, 10-11, 21; 4:1-17, 25, 29, 32; 5:19, 21-32; Phil 2:1-15; Col 1:18, 28; 2:2; 3:11-16, 25; 4:8; 1Th 2:11-12; 3:2; 4:1-12, 18; 5:11, 13; 1Ti 2:8-10; 3:1-7; 4:13; Tit 1:6-9; Heb 3:13; 10:19-25; 13:1, 7, 17, 22, 24; Jam 5:16; 1Pe 1:13-25; 2:1-12, 19-21; 3:8; 4:1-2, 8-11; 5:5, 12; 1Jn 1:7; 4:4; 5:12; Jude 20; Rev 2 (all); 3 (all); 5:9-10

Local Church Polity

The type and method of local church organization, administration and day-to-day function are critical to the proper and effective fulfillment of its God-commanded responsibilities and mission. The currently-prevailing local church paradigm bears little resemblance to the example set in scripture. Yet, it has become so widely embraced and entrenched that the very attempt to reestablish the scriptural model is seen as radical, unnecessary and even foolish or rebellious. Nevertheless, serious reform in this area is vitally needed.

The following elements of this flawed paradigm can be found in many, if not most of today's local churches:

- Designation of clergy and laity classes
- Failure to appoint elders (pastors) from among the congregation itself - and failure to identify and develop future elders
- Flying candidates in from all over the country (and world) to fill the lone pastor or "senior" pastor position with whomever wins the "talent contest"
- Emphasis upon and evaluation of pastors (elders) according to educational achievement, oratory skill, charisma and practical considerations (including the prospective pastor's wife's abilities) rather than scriptural qualification
- Choosing a pastor (elder) from fresh seminary graduates; young men not nearly qualified or experienced for the position (perhaps not even saved)
- Reliance upon a single elder (pastor) in place of a plurality of elders
- Appointment of associate and senior pastors (hierarchical pastorship)

- Implementation of “elder boards” or even “deacon boards” in place of true biblical eldership - in addition to, rather than actual church leadership itself
- Whether or not a plurality of elders is in place, the actual responsibilities and work biblically assigned to the eldership going unmet
- Lack of congregational awareness of the elders’ availability and function
- Pastors unfamiliar with the spiritual state of the sheep in their charge
- Adoption of women pastors and, even in churches which properly hold to male leadership, the prevalent phenomenon of women actually running it (often, but not always, because men shirk the duty - though where this is the case, the men are minimally shirking the duty to rectify it)
- Movement of pastors on a regular basis from one pastorate to another
- Formation of church “youth groups” which focus inordinately on providing the youth with fun rather than seriously challenging them from and holding them accountable to God’s Word
- Employment of “youth pastors” who are generally too young, inexperienced and lacking the maturity and wisdom to minister to arguably the most difficult, impressionable and valuable church demographic
- Hierarchical responsibility to non-local “superior” authority in place of local autonomy accountable directly and solely to God and scripture as overseen by the proper leadership and authority of qualified elders
- Meeting the “event schedule” rather than laboring at the purposes of God
- Lack of effective discipleship and Christian growth in the congregation
- Lack of edifying, godly fellowship among members beyond service times
- Failure to address sin and disciplinary issues among the congregation
- Allowing the unsaved to serve in ministry support positions
- “Supporting” worldwide missions while ignoring evangelism opportunities and outreach needs “next door” (willingness to send money while balking at investing individual and corporate time, labor and self)
- Absence of evangelism beyond token “check-off” efforts (greatly owing to inability/unpreparedness to evangelize; lack of a mature grasp of doctrine)
- Unnecessarily massive and ornate buildings and real estate which unduly drain church assets and which are not nearly utilized to their potential

An exhaustive list would be quite lengthy and would touch on many other areas. But for the purpose here - merely from the viewpoint of proper doctrinal focus - let the following be clearly understood: The books of Acts, 1 Timothy and Titus, in particular, provide the model and teaching related to local church organization, leadership and function. It is difficult to expect the modern church

to teach and hold to true doctrine in other areas when it is founded, led, and operating in a manner which itself is not a true reflection of the scriptural model.

Baptism and Communion

Believer's Baptism and Communion are the only two sacramental ordinances commanded in scripture for observance by God's true Church. Clearly, these have been designed by God exclusively for believers, since their profound significance and purpose inherently preclude non-believers (no matter how strong their pious interest or how deep their "religious" affection).

Involving non-believers in ordinances which obviously require true belief (saving faith) irrationally proffers such folks as representatives of the Church, Christianity and God. Such practice corrupts the pure testimony and influence for which true Christianity ought to be striving. Furthermore, it contaminates the proper inner functioning and outward working of the Church. All of this leads to and invites mocking and scorn, bringing the very truths of God into disrepute.

Baptism

Scripture distinguishes "John's baptism" from that which Jesus instituted (believer's Baptism). John the Baptist's baptism was a Jewish custom, not a Christian sacrament. It was a ritual of Jewish religion, not the Christian confession of reconciliation and right relationship with God; that is, a testimony of forgiveness and salvation attained through God's grace and mercy - made possible only through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross..

John's baptism ministry was a preparatory ministry, pointing the people to "the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world." His baptism was not a testimony of experiential salvation and played no role in obtaining it. It merely signified an attitude of preparation for the coming Messiah focusing on repentance of past and current sins along with a commitment to avoid them in the future; to do good and to produce fruit in keeping with true repentance.

However, even a well-intentioned and sincere participant could not fulfill this commitment in any way close to perfection since it relied on his imperfect ability, character and integrity. Although genuine faith in God may have been present, knowledge of the ultimate remission of sins was limited and undeveloped. The concept of sin's atonement - yet to be accomplished through Christ's shed blood - remained a cryptic component of prophecy awaiting fulfillment.

And so, those baptized by John retained an OT faith, looking forward to a Messiah still to come; to a Savior and salvation not yet consummated in time or able to be fully comprehended. This unrecognized Savior would soon afterward perfectly finish the work which alone could actually remove sin once and for all.

Now that the work of the cross is completed, John's baptism - along with the OT sacrifices and rituals - is no longer necessary or valid; it serves no meaningful purpose. Rather than preparing for a Savior who will come to save, the believer prepares for His return - when He will take home with Him those He has saved.

John baptized with water to symbolize purification, consistent with OT Jewish custom and religion. While believer's Baptism also utilizes water symbolically, it points not to the ineffectual, repetitive cleansing of the OT but to the once-for-all, actual removal of the believer's sin made possible only through Christ's substitutionary sacrifice. Additionally, water is one of scripture's symbols for the Holy Spirit, the Agent by which the new birth is effected - the new birth which Baptism is designed to call attention to.

Believer's baptism has no part in this removal of sin; that is, in the achieving of salvation in the new birth - either as the work itself or as justification for the work. It is not *the* means or even *a* means to salvation - nor is it an essential component of some larger means. Baptism is one of the only 2 Church ordinances, the other being Communion. It is a sacrament; an outward, public act on the part of the participant testifying of an inward work on the part of God.

The finished work of Christ is the sole and complete basis and logical justification for the propitiation of God's judgment upon the saved sinner. This alone allows God to retain His integrity and righteousness in the exercise of His grace and mercy to remove the believer's sin and declare him justified and righteous, eternally saved. And the supernatural, regenerative work of the Holy Spirit is the sole power and means which permanently consummates this reconciliation, restoring spiritual life where death previously reigned.

Baptism is the believer's willing, enthusiastic public identification with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; his declaration that the regenerative washing of rebirth and renewal by the power of the Holy Spirit has taken place in him; his joyful obedience to this commanded rite as a new member of God's spiritual family - the Father's legitimate and dearly-loved child, Jesus' brother, the Holy Spirit's dwelling, and a sibling of all other believers - past, present and future.

Unlike John's baptism - which was essentially a participant's self-conviction and vow of commitment to self-correction rooted in self-effort - believer's Baptism is a proclamation of an already-completed work reliant upon and effected by the hand and power of God. It is the believer's expression of his faith in the work of salvation accomplished on his behalf, his acknowledged repentance of sin accompanied by evidence of a changed life and new attitude, his testimony that he is now a new creation in Christ, his commitment to conduct himself in obedience to the scriptures and to be held accountable to that by his Christian brothers, sisters, and leaders, and his eager acceptance of his share of responsibility in the work which God has delegated and entrusted to the Church.

Obviously, it is logically impossible for non-believers and infants to include themselves in such things. Any teaching which asserts that baptism of infants or non-believers is in any way effectual or availing for eternal spiritual benefit is false. As stated, Baptism is the public confirmation of a previously effected change at the hand of God, on *His* sovereign schedule; not the effort to accomplish that change at the hand of men at a time of their own choosing.

Even so, some claim that ritualistic baptism removes "original sin," infuses God's grace, gains entrance into God's family, and other such things - even claiming that baptism is actually the regenerative spiritual rebirth Jesus refers to in Jn 3; that to be baptized is to be born again (the Catholic church); that baptism is the sinner's supernatural enrollment in God's true Church. Such claims are easily dismissed when scripture alone guides doctrinal conviction.

In any case, Baptism is to be administered only to those who profess and demonstrate a credible testimony of regeneration by the Holy Spirit - and such folks are to be instructed and encouraged to be baptized. Resistance to Baptism (absent extraordinary circumstances) is disobedient to the scriptures and calls into question the legitimacy of the rebirth testimony.

The method of Baptism continues to be a cause of Christian disunity. Argument exists over whether water immersion must be accepted as the only valid form or if pouring and sprinkling should be allowed. We choose immersion but certainly allow for pouring or sprinkling in cases where immersion is not practical.

It cannot be denied that there is profound symbolism in water immersion - the "going under" and "coming up" (the old man, living for self and sin, put to death and buried; the new man, dedicated to Christ and righteousness, emerging anew, having been rebirthed unto eternal life). However, this is merely

symbolic; no actual supernatural work is at play. Still, this is the strongly-preferred method whenever possible - and when it is not, it is incumbent upon the one administering the baptism to clearly present an accurate and thorough teaching of this important rite.

A similarity may be seen in the concept of fasting. God knows and judges the heart; He is concerned with substance, not form. 40 days in the desert without food is merely one example of application of the principle, not the dogmatic teaching of an empirical model. And just as with Baptism, though scripture mentions fasting often, it contains no specific teaching regarding a fixed, singularly-acceptable manner and method.

In the end, it is not the ritual which is sacred; rather, it is the work of God celebrated in the ritual. In the same way, Jesus exposed the error of worshiping the Sabbath and esteeming the Sabbath regulations as holy unto themselves; it was the Sabbath which was created for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mk 2:27). Likewise, Baptism has been instituted for man, not man for Baptism.

Next, further argument exists over whether or not Baptism is required for salvation. But this is an entirely unnecessary debate. Overall scriptural logic and sense make it abundantly clear that Baptism is not and cannot be a salvation requisite. Baptism is designed for believers; those who have been born again and are therefore saved. Since scripture teaches that believers can know they have eternal life on the basis of their saving faith alone, how then can any contingency be imposed on top of that?

Summarizing then, Baptism is neither an avenue to salvation nor a deal-breaker causing God to withhold salvation from the born-again until a legitimate, raised-seal original of their baptismal certificate is produced. Baptism has no role, in whole or in part, either as a means to salvation or, when that is properly acknowledged, as a contingent companion or essential component of salvation. It is simply an ordinance of identification - willingly and joyfully undertaken by those who have already been brought to saving faith.

In the extreme, the opposing view insists that one who is born again and dies an instant later (or whenever) is nevertheless destined for Hell if not baptized. Among proponents, this radical view is mitigated to various degrees. However, this false teaching seeks to justify its assertions either on the basis that the reborn one was unfaithful to scripture's command to be baptized (whether or not

he had opportunity) or an undeniable implication (stated or not) that Baptism actually does play a role in obtaining and/or securing a sinner's salvation.

In whatever manner this view is held, its case rests essentially upon Mk 16:16 and Act 2:37-41. First however, scholars are uncertain about whether or not Mk 16:9-20 is even a legitimate part of Mark's writing. Second, even if so, while the first half of verse 16 ("Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved ...") seems to support requisite Baptism, the second half immediately undoes that support ("...but whoever does not believe will be condemned.").

In order for Mk 16:16 to be appealed to as a proof text, it would have to read: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe, or believes but is not baptized will be condemned." As it is, the verse does not address the one who believes but is not baptized. We cannot choose to presume (in contradiction to the remaining counsel of God's Word) that one who fits this unstated case is condemned. There must be a consistency between what *is* stated and the whole of scripture's soteriological teaching; that believers are saved irrespective of their Baptism status. We cannot know the Holy Spirit's purpose in raising the Baptism issue in this verse, but we do know that it was not to nullify His teachings elsewhere or to spur disunity among Christians.

The first half of the verse may merely reflect the natural expectation that the saved will and should pursue Baptism (especially if under proper teaching and discipleship) and that only believers will and should do so. Baptism is omitted in the latter case because it is simply incongruent that a non-believer would be baptized. Yet, even if such a one should be, he remains a non-believer and is condemned on that basis alone. Baptism has nothing to do with it.

In reality then, Mk 16:16's support for requisite Baptism is reduced to the irresolvable curiosity as to why the Holy Spirit inspired Mark to mention Baptism here at all. If scripture did not treat the subject, then the significance of its mention here might be seen differently. Or, if scripture elsewhere taught Baptism as a requirement, then this verse might add confirmation. But since those two conditions are not true, we cannot know why the verse mentions Baptism. Since we do know from the whole of scripture that Baptism is not a salvation requisite, we know it is not included here to teach otherwise.

In the Acts 2 passage, Baptism is not at all offered as a salvation mandate. Quite simply, those who accepted and responded properly to the gospel presentation were encouraged to be baptized. Since "those who accepted" is

specified, the logical implication is that others did not. And those who did not were excluded from Baptism - because Baptism is reserved for believers.

Quite tellingly, scripture's promises to believers are never predicated on being baptized; salvation is assured on the basis of saving faith alone (Jn 20:31; 1Jn 5:13; Jn 17:3). In contrast to the erroneous assertion that the passages from Mark and Acts posit Baptism as essential to salvation, many similarly isolated passages teach salvation *apart* from Baptism - Rom 10:9-11 and Act 16:30-31 are just two. Examining the entirety of scriptural soteriology makes it impossible to assert that Baptism is a component piece. The simplest counter-argument is that no verses explicitly offering salvation assurance mention Baptism (some examples: Jn 20:31; 1Jn 5:11-13; Heb 9:28; 10:19-22a).

Finally, when confronted with the case of the thief on the cross assured of Heaven by Jesus Himself (though he was not baptized), the offered explanation states that the thief died under a different dispensation; that the Baptism requisite was not yet in effect. This excuse is also used to explain how God is able to include OT saints in salvation on the basis of faith alone (Gen 15:3) - in the absence of Baptism during that period. But such attempts are simply examples of making it up as you go - there is no scriptural basis for any of that.

Communion (The Lord's Supper)

Communion is the second scripture-commanded ordinance for Church observance. Its purpose is two-fold: that believers should purposefully and soberly remember Jesus in *looking back* to His profound sacrifice AND *look forward* with eager and joyful anticipation to when they will join Jesus at the banquet table when He will, for the first time since the Last Supper, drink of the vine again. Regular and deliberate meditation upon the various truths embodied in all of this fosters an increasing appreciation for their profound significance - both in individual believers and in the body of Christ as a whole.

In turn, a fresh and keen awareness of what God has done in and for those who are saved - what Christ truly and fully represents and means to them - is more effectively maintained. And thus, an appropriate temperament rooted in love, gratitude and humility is more likely to influence and direct the outworking of their daily lives. Proper Communion observance also provides a reminder of and motivation to tend to the commanded Christian duty of godly obedience; holy living. And all of this encourages believers toward vigilance in maintaining right relationship not only with God, but with one another in Him.

As with baptism, participation in Communion is neither a means to salvation nor a requirement of it. Some teach that through this sacrament (and Baptism - and by other means, including non-scriptural “sacraments”) “grace” is obtained. This “grace” then enables the good works necessary to gain entrance to Heaven. An additional false teaching is the doctrine of transubstantiation, which claims that the elements of bread and wine (or juice) are literally changed into the flesh and blood of Jesus. False teachings of this type are the reason why the model of Acts 17:11 must be taken seriously and actively employed.

Nevertheless, while Baptism and Communion are not salvation requisites, both are to be properly observed in obedience to scripture’s commands.

Gen 15:3; Ex 12:1-14; 1Sa 31:13; 2Sa 1:12; 12:16; 1Ki 21:27; Neh 1:4; 9:1; Ps 44:20-21; 109:24; 130:7; Pr 15:3; Isa 40:1-2; 53:4-6, 12; 58:3-7; Zec 7:5-6; Mt 3:1-8, 11-17; 4:2; 6:16-18; 12:1-11, 50; 26:1-30; 28:16-20; Mk 1:1-11; 2:23-28; 14:1-26; 16:16; Lk 2:39-43; 3:1-22; 6:1-11; 7:24-35; 13:10-16; 14:1-6; 18:12; 22:1-20; 23:32-43; Jn 1:12, 15-36; 3:3, 22-23; 4:1-2; 5:9-18; 6:28-58, 64; 7:22-24; 9:14-16; 14:1-3, 15-17, 21, 23; 15:14; 17:3; 19:28-30; 20:31; 21:17; Act 2:14-47; 3:19; 5:13; 8:12-13, 35-39; 9:18; 10:37, 44-48; 11:15-16; 13:24; 15:8; 16:15, 29-34; 17:11; 18:8, 25; 19:1-5; 20:7; 22:16; 26:20; Rom 3:21-26; 4:25; 5:9-11; 6:1-13; 8:3-4; 10:9-11; 1Co 2:14; 3:16; 4:5; 6:19; 10:14-21; 11:17-34; 12:13; 2Co 4:13-14; 5:17, 21; 6:14-18; Gal 3:26-29; 4:4-5; 5:16; Eph 1:7; 2:13, 19; 4:1, 3-5; 5:1, 15; Phil 1:27; Col 1:19-20; 2:12-13; 1Th 4:7, 13-14; 2Ti 1:9; Tit 3:3-7; Heb 1:3; 2:11, 17; 4:13; 9:15, 22, 26, 28; 10:1-14, 18-22; 13:12; Jam 2:12; 1Pe 1:3, 15-16, 18-19, 23; 2:24; 3:18-22; 2Pe 2:2; 3:11; 1Jn 2:2, 12; 3:1, 5, 20; 5:11-13; Rev 1:5-6; 18:4; 19:9

Christian Marriage and Family

Scripture presents a clear description of God’s view of and intention for marriage and family. God instituted marriage as the uniting of one man with one woman in lifetime, loving commitment - undertaken with vows by both spouses to persevere through any and all difficulties and hardships until the death of one or both ends the relationship. The uniting which God designed and implements in marriage involves the scripture-taught mystery of supernatural bonding, so that the two who are joined become one flesh.

The family is the God-designed unit and ideal venue for the teaching/learning, testing, propagation and application of scriptural principles. Although each individual Christian is a valuable and necessary building-block in the local Church structure, a properly-functioning Christian family is uniquely powerful and effective as a testimony and influence for God; a microcosm of the larger local church (and, in the ideal, the universal Church). The daily joys and trials of family interrelationship are proving grounds for applying godly principles and disciplines which the believer then employs in his larger sphere of influence.

In the ideal, the husband serves as the family's spiritual leader, shepherding the family as Christ shepherds the Church. While scripture exhorts wives to submit to the godly leadership of their husbands, and children are instructed to obey the godly headship of their parents, men are warned against abusing their authority. The husband's role is to emulate Christ's example and entails great humility and self-sacrifice. Men are to be aware of and enthusiastically serving the needs of their wives and children in sacrificial, loving service. They are not to be self-appointed dictators seeking, above all, to have their own desires and interests satisfied. Rather, in submission to God, husbands are God-appointed servant-leaders by His plan and design, pursuing God's interests and fulfilling His purpose by serving the needs of the family.

Common sense refutes the modern abominations of marriage and family being promulgated and even "legalized" - both in the civil realm and in the merely "religious" community. The notions of homosexual marriage, marriages void of mutual commitment and love (such as "arranged" marriages, "celebrity" marriages, marriages of "convenience" or for political motives or otherwise for the mere sake of appearance), polygamy, unmarried co-habitation, and other such twistings and abuses of legitimate marriage are detestable to God.

The fact that scripture provides historical record of even men of God engaging in various misuses of marriage has no bearing on the institution ordained by God. One of scripture's components is the rendering of historical events. Many of those events involve sinful behaviors and attitudes, even and especially among God's people. Their inclusion must be seen in context: God does not condone the sinful behaviors; He merely inspired their inclusion as part of the historical record - clearly for other purposes. Many folks point to these events to "prove" that such behavior is not wrong. For example, polygamy and arranged marriages were rampant among even some of the most noted of God's people. But those misdeeds do not alter what God has clearly prescribed for marriage.

Scripture's allegorical presentation of marriage - Christ as the groom, and His Church, the body consisting of all believers, as His bride - is quite compelling. Obviously, this marriage is to be, and in fact will be, perfect and undefiled. Though the marriages of believers will fall short, they are to strive for this ideal.

In particular, scripture calls for the marriage bed to remain pure. The importance of marital faithfulness is self-evident. Violation of this trust is so

traumatic and damaging that God used the picture of marital unfaithfulness to describe and lament the sinfulness and idolatry of His chosen people in the OT.

But in every way, the marriage relationship should involve mutual love, respect, service, compassion, godly submission and so much more - so that the marriage functions in ongoing progression of sanctification toward a true reflection of the ideal. Men are admonished to love their wives as Christ loves the Church and, as mentioned, women are called upon to submit to their husbands' godly leadership as they should to the Lord Himself. Though men and women are given different roles in marriage (and in the Church), they are of equal value to God - each unique and indispensable in God's order.

Scripture discusses the role of sex in marriage and the proper attitude for each spouse to maintain. Nowhere does scripture teach or even hint that the purpose of marital sex is restricted to procreation. Rather, the sexual relationship is designed by God to be the ultimate manifestation and expression of the godly love of each spouse for the other. As God wills, this brings forth children for whom the parents become responsible, under God's guidance.

The most important aspect of this parental responsibility is nurturing the child in the Lord; providing godly training and instruction. Parents must effectively convey the truths of God and His Word, and model not only proper Christian behaviors and attitudes generally, but specifically the godly pattern of marriage for the child to adopt and, if it is God's will, to later employ himself/herself.

Children are commanded to honor and obey their parents and to show them proper respect. Proper parental discipline is to be cherished and accepted as a sign of the parents' loving concern for the child's best good (as God's discipline is designed so that His children should share in His holiness). Fathers are particularly warned not to be overbearing so as to avoid exasperating their children. In a right-functioning Christian family setting, godly principles govern the interrelationships of all members with one another.

God's Word makes His view of divorce very clear: He hates it; divorce is not part of His plan or design. For a married couple consisting of 2 true Christians of sound mind, divorce is not an acceptable option because, with such qualification, any difficulties are able to be resolved. If each is a true Christian, then scriptural principles can be applied to remedy any difficulties and restore the relationship (though, as with all forgiven transgressions this side of Heaven, unpleasant and undesired consequences may remain). If one or both refuses to

apply the scriptural remedies, then there is the real possibility that one or both is not truly saved or, though saved indeed, one or both is nevertheless sinning by resisting and being uncooperative in applying God's healing prescription.

Gen 1:26-28; 2:18-24; 4:1-2; Ex 20:12, 14; Lev 18:20; Dt 4:9; 6:4-9; 11:18-21; 32:45-47; Jos 24:15; Job 24:15; Ps 78:1-8; 127:3; Pr 1:8; 2:16-19; 5:3-6, 15-20; 6:20-29, 32; 7 (all); 12:4; 13:24; 15:5, 20; 17:6; 18:22; 22:6, 14-15; 23:13-14; 29:15, 17; 30:20; 31:10-31; Ecc 9:9; Jer 5:7-9; 29:23; Eze 33:26; Mal 2:14-16; Mt 5:27-28; 31-32; 19:3-9; Mk 10:6-12; Lk 16:18; Jn 3:29; Rom 7:2-3; 1Co 6:9-10; 7:1-15; 2Co 11:2; Eph 5:21-33; 6:1-4; Col 3:18-21; Tit 2:2-6; Heb 13:4; 1Pe 3:1-7; Rev 19:7

Other Relevant Issues:

Homosexuality

There is no ambiguity in scripture about issues related to sexual immorality.

(See "[Sexual Immorality](#)")

Homosexuality, transvestism (cross-dressing), transsexualism, transgenderism (not to include birth-related physical gender confusion or those who otherwise experience and properly resolve "normal" gender identity issues), and the many other sexually immoral behaviors, lifestyles and deviancies, along with notions such as homosexual marriage, domestic partnerships and other such things are simply sinful rebellion against God and His Word.

Engaging in these perversions apart from God and His Word - rejecting His sovereign authority - is logically consistent and understandable. These days, however, folks attempt to reconcile these abominable practices with convenient distortions of scripture and their own manufactured "God," arguing that God accepts all people as they are and does not judge them for such behavior. Christians are then admonished to follow this false claim of God's example; to embrace the homosexual lifestyle (and all others) without judgment. Attempts to present the truth from God's non-twisted Word are attacked as phobic, judgmental, self-righteous, hate-driven and with other convenient mischaracterizations of proper Christian motive.

Clearly, those who seek to justify the unjustifiable - lobbying for Christian acceptance of what God rejects - are mired in deception, either self-inflicted or under the influence of cultural mores or the false teachings of others. Except for the blinding inflicted by Satan (2Co 4:4), it would seem impossible that those who shamelessly promote and parade such immorality actually believe what they claim or could hold any hope of persuading and indoctrinating others.

In any case, a lengthy debate over God's view of these issues is really not necessary. Extended discussions usually involve contrarians who have no interest in or intention to conform themselves to God's legitimate Word.

Birth Control

Birth control, per se, is not mentioned in scripture. The incident in Gen 38:6-10 is often pointed to as proof of God's judgment on birth control, but the context there involves something entirely different.

Birth control is a matter of personal conviction and Christian liberty (but Gal 5:13 and 1Pe 2:16 warn us not to abuse our freedom in Christ). That is, one legitimate approach is to choose not to use any method of birth control at all and, in faith, to rely on God to direct the results. But choosing to use birth control is not a wrong or sinful choice, per se. Obviously, using any method designed to work post-conception (whether the "morning" after or at any other point) is a form of abortion, not birth control (see Abortion section below).

Some folks extol "natural" means and condemn "artificial" means, but any attempt to manipulate if and when pregnancy will occur is able to be cast in the same light when viewed from a strictly legalistic perspective. Abstaining from sex or using timing techniques may just as easily be painted as "faithless" or "disobedient" as any of the available "artificial" means.

When offered arguments are properly examined, fallacies of logic become clearer. If being a faithful Christian requires total exclusion of birth control, then would not the purchase of various insurance policies also betray a lack of faith in God? And there are myriad other practical steps believers take for their welfare, prosperity, safety and various other considerations which, employing the logic of excluding birth control, should also be refrained from. For those who reject this logic because they do indeed eschew birth control and insurance policies and view the choice to do otherwise as unfaithful, it must be pointed out that those 2 items are just the beginning of an endless list. Next, there is the "unfaithfulness" of setting an alarm clock, or locking a door, and on and on.

God is the Author and Provider of practical methods and solutions. On dogmatic issues, God makes the one proper path clear. Regarding liberty issues, true faith is the seeking of God's will by the believer, for the believer - and trusting Him to deal with others as He will (Jn 21:23; Rom 14:1-13).

Whatever the choice, the motivation is the determining factor (God alone sees and knows the heart). Avoiding the use of birth control due to a legalistic view of the issue, especially when accompanied by inappropriate judgment of the choice of others, is wrong. Likewise is the use of birth control when driven by selfish desires, the pursuit of sinful activities, rebellion against the Holy Spirit's prompting, or the Christian couple's actual failure to trust God.

God's will should be sought through prayer and fasting, individually and by the couple together. Practical concerns, if otherwise appropriate, may be allowed influence when they do not violate God's prompting.

Patriotism

God's Word calls the believer to obey secular leaders as long as such obedience is not disobedient to God and His Word. However, the notions of patriotism and the pledging of unqualified personal allegiance go a dangerous step further, introducing difficulties outside the control of the believer who commits himself to flag and country. Such a commitment causes the believer to sign on to national policies, philosophies and practices - not only those currently in place and known, but any and all future modifications and additions, as well.

On one hand, believers must strive to be model citizens. They ought to obey laws and regulations, pay their taxes, and support and assist the government's efforts when they are not at odds with God's plan and purpose.

On the other, unqualified loyalty to secular leadership is an unequal yoking for believers - and the opportunity to secure, in a binding manner, the necessary qualifications is not available or even possible. Committing one's support and pledging personal allegiance inevitably forces the believer to choose which commitment and pledge he will break - the one made to his country, or to God.

Especially in these times when secular leaders at all levels are openly corrupt, immoral and opposed to God, and when laws and policies are formulated with an overt exclusion of and disdain for guidance from God's Word, the believer must avoid any commitment beyond that which is necessary and does not create conflict in his relationship with God.

On a final note, enlisting as a committed supporter or pledged ally of state puts the believer at risk for identification with the philosophies, doctrines, attitudes, and political, social, economic and other platforms and actions of state. The need to extricate oneself from the various contradictions which are sure to arise

is avoided when allegiance to God is properly considered and prioritized before the believer signs on to secular commitments and national interests.

Mt 22:15-21; Act 4:19; 5:29; Rom 13:1-7; 2Co 6:14-18; Gal 1:10; Tit 3:1

Age of Accountability (or Consent or Reason)

[Age of Accountability](#) (AOA) - also known as Age of Consent or Age of Reason - is a false doctrine which states that children who die *automatically* go to Heaven - simply because they are “children.” Unlike false teachings deliberately crafted for evil deception and profit, AOA is somewhat well-intentioned but nevertheless misguided (the same mindset disavows [Eternal Security](#)).

The issues of [Age of Accountability](#) and [Eternal Security](#) are thoroughly addressed at these indicated links.