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## Letter to the Reader

Do you believe in God? Do you want to go to Heaven when you die? If the end of the world happens today, are you ready to face God?

The answers to all spiritual questions are in the Bible. It is the word of God. It is the way God talks to people today. It contains the good news of salvation. You can find the **truth** by reading the entire Bible; however, that takes a long time. This Bible study guide is intended as a shortcut to help you find answers.

What do you need? Maybe you want to have a close relationship with God, but don't know how. Maybe you have tried to read the Bible, but it is just too hard to understand. Maybe the fact that there are so many different religions confuses you. How can everybody be right when one religion says one thing and another says something totally different?

As you read this study guide, pray for God's guidance and wisdom. May God bless you as you learn the good news of Jesus Christ, the Savior.

Note: All scriptures are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible. Words in brackets are author's comments.

## Chapter 1

### Who is God?

No one knows where God came from nor how He came to be, yet the Bible tells us that we must believe that He exists. What does the Bible say about God?

- He made the whole world and everything that is in it. “In the beginning God [not man, not idols, not just by chance] created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).
- “... The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable” (Isaiah 40:28). God is all-knowing. (He knows everything!)
- God is holy (only good, sinless, worthy of all respect and honor, awesome) and He is the King. He is the only God there is. He wants to save you (Isaiah 43:11-15).
- “... God is love” (I John 4:8). Isn’t it comforting to know that the Power of the Universe, who is in control of the world, is a loving God and not cruel or evil?
- No one has ever seen God. He is invisible. Look what is written in I Timothy 6:15-16: “... He who is the blessed and only Potentate [Ruler], the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality [always alive, will never die], dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.”
- Then why are we expected to believe in God, if we can’t even see him? Think about this. You already believe in lots of things that you can’t see. For example, you can’t see the wind, but you can see the effects of it when it shakes the leaves on the trees and makes a kite fly. Next time there is a windy day, look around you. You can’t see the wind, but you can see what it is doing. Another example is pain. You can’t see it, but you know it is there when you are hurt. You can’t see cold, but you believe it exists when you see water freeze into ice. You can’t see helium, but you can see a balloon. Fill the balloon with helium and watch what it does! This is what the Bible is telling

us in Romans 1:20: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly SEEN, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they [men] are without excuse.”

- So, from the things God has made in our universe, we can see that there is a God. For example, Psalm 19:1 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.” Look at nature: Who can make a powerful thunderstorm? Who can make the mountains? Who can make the ocean as huge and deep as it is? Can you? Can any human do that? Of course not! Who can make the planets revolve around the sun and the moon revolve around the earth? Who can hang the stars in the sky? Who could ever think up all the different kinds of plants: vegetables, flowers, trees, bushes, grasses, wheat, cotton, etc., and then make them grow in their seasons? Who on earth can “make” an elephant, or even a tiny ant? Look around you. God is everywhere!
- Another way we can see God is found in I John 4:12: “No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.” You can’t see love, but you know it exists, don’t you?
- If you would like to read what God says about Himself, read chapters 38 through 41 in the book of Job. God answered Job when he questioned who God really was. Job, who was only HUMAN, questioned who was really in charge. Take time to read it. You will find out the power of God and how wonderfully He made the whole world.
- There are many, many verses in the Bible that teach you about God and who He is. The answers to your questions will be found in His word. Read the Bible and get to know God.

## Chapter 2 How to Study the Bible

The Bible is the word of God. It is God's "instruction manual" on how to be saved (how to go to heaven) and how to worship Him in the correct way. The Bible is the **ONLY** authority we must follow because it is the true word of God. As you read the Scriptures in the lessons, let God speak to you! He knows who you are. He loves you. And He is talking to **YOU**, personally!

II Timothy 3:16-17 says: "All Scripture [the whole Bible] is given by inspiration of God [it came right from the mouth of God], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof [showing us our sins], for correction [what to do about sin], for instruction in righteousness [learning how to do right] that the man of God [you!] may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work [to do all the things God wants you to do]." The Bible is the greatest miracle of all time. It is filled with saving power. It speaks to all people of all races throughout all time! It has been carefully preserved through the centuries, so that we, today, can read the same words that God wrote (through men) thousands of years ago! However, it is not outdated or too old to have meaning for us today. I Peter 1:23 says the Bible is the living and enduring word of God. Did you get that? It is **LIVING**; not dead and **not** unimportant.

II Timothy 2:15 tells us that we must study the Bible and know how to use it. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Someone once said, "How embarrassing it would be to stand before God on the Judgment Day and say, 'I am sorry. I never read your book.'" (Is 75 or 80 years just not long enough to read through the Bible? Think about that!)

When you study the Bible, watch out for attitudes that can get in your way. Don't begin with the idea, "I'll read it, but I'll only believe what I want to believe." God says that kind of pride is wrong. Romans 1:18-21 tells of men who suppress the truth (don't believe it or obey it) by the evil things that they do and think. It says that even though men knew God, they didn't honor Him or give thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile (useless) and their foolish hearts were darkened. In other words, because of their pride, sin lived in them instead of the love of

God. And they were lost! Instead, we should conform (be submissive, obedient) to God, and do what HE wants instead of what WE want (James 4:6-8). When you study the Scriptures, keep an open mind. Be careful not to have the attitude of “prejudging” or reaching a conclusion before all the facts are in.

Some say, “Don’t confuse me with a lot of Bible verses. My mind is already made up about what I believe.” Or, some may say, “I’ll always believe what my parents and grandparents believed. It’s tradition!” And others rely only on the things their minister says, never reading the word for themselves. Allow yourself to think about this: “You can’t hold your preacher’s hand and get into heaven!” Each person must answer to the Lord. It is YOUR responsibility to learn the Truth and live it.

There are examples in the Bible of people who prejudged Jesus. In John 1:45-46, Philip told Nathanael that he had found the Christ, a man named Jesus, of the town of Nazareth. Nathanael said, “... ‘Can anything GOOD come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’ ” See, he was prejudging. Something good did come out of Nazareth—the Savior, Jesus!

In Mark 6:1-6, Jesus went to preach and teach and do miracles in His own hometown where He grew up. But many people just couldn’t believe that He was the Son of God. They knew His mother and His brothers and sisters. “Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed him. ... And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, ‘Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary? ...’ ” They did not believe in Him. Verse 6 says, “And He [Jesus] marveled [was amazed] because of their unbelief.

They were prejudging. Since they had known Him from the time He was a little boy, and since He just seemed like an ordinary carpenter (a regular guy, not a king or celebrity); he could not possibly be the Son of God. But they were wrong! Test every religious idea by the Bible. If what someone is telling you is different from what God says in the Bible, then you must believe the Bible instead of man. Don’t let anyone pressure you (force you) into becoming a Christian. That is something only

YOU can decide for yourself. The only thing that should have the power to touch your life and change you is the word of God in your heart. The power is in the message (the Bible) not in the messenger (the person teaching you).

Romans 1:16 says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ [the good news of Jesus], for it is the POWER of God to salvation for everyone [including YOU] who believes. ...” James 1:21 says we must “... receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” And the next verse says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” So, let the Bible convict you (touch you, teach you, and move you to do what is right), as you find out what God is saying to you.

Picture this: the Bible is God’s library. It contains 66 books: 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. It was written by about 40 or so men. II Peter 1:20-21 says that the Bible was written by men whom God chose. God, through the Holy Spirit, told the men what to write. It wasn’t man’s words and ideas; it was God’s. The Bible is a wonderful book and everything in it is true. It is perfectly united all the way through. There is one continuing message throughout the Bible, which is:

### **Jesus is coming! Jesus is here! Jesus is coming again!**

The theme is that Jesus, the Son of God, was sent to earth on a special mission to save you and me. This theme is told in three parts. The Old Testament reveals the news that a Savior is going to come into the world someday.

In the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) the Bible is saying, “The Savior is here!” Each of these four books tell the story of the time in history when Jesus, the Son of God, came and lived on earth as a man and then returned to Heaven. The rest of the New Testament, from Acts to Revelation, tells us that the Savior is coming back again someday! Keep this theme in mind as you explore the Old and New Testaments.

Many people decide they want to read the Bible, but they don’t know where to begin. Some feel intimidated and overwhelmed by such a long book. Some just read a few pages here and there and

never get the “big picture” of what is happening, so they feel that it is just too hard to understand.

The next two chapters will give you a brief overview of what the Bible is about. You will get an idea of the history (the true and continuing story) of the Bible. Then, when you begin reading the Bible for yourself, the details will make more sense to you. Be patient with yourself! Don't expect to understand everything the first time. The more you read the Bible, the more you will understand. Read it over and over. Make it a habit! Set aside a special time each day to let God's word soak in.

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### **Chapter 3** **The Old Testament**

#### **This is Part 1 of the Continuing Theme of the Bible Jesus is Coming!**

Let's start with the Old Testament. One very important thing is taught all the way through, and that is the “lineage” of Jesus Christ; in other words, the ancestors or forefathers of the family through which Jesus would someday be born. Many people today enjoy researching their own genealogy, finding out who their ancestors are and where they were from, etc. If you studied your own genealogy, you might find out that your family history is very interesting. You might learn your ancestors lived in another country, or maybe that they moved from place to place. Perhaps some were kings or famous soldiers, or just hard-working pioneers!

It would be interesting to see how, through time, sons and daughters were born, then grandchildren (and so on) and how the family tree ends up with YOU! In that same way, the Old Testament is the history that goes along with Jesus' family tree. Notice all the way through how God protects and preserves a whole nation of people, the Jews. It is through this large family of people, this holy nation, that Jesus was to come into the world. In Genesis, we learn that God created the whole world and everything in it. Adam was the first man. Eve was the first woman. They sinned by disobeying God's command and God

made them leave the beautiful Garden of Eden. Their son, Cain, killed his brother, Abel. That was the first murder. (See how sin came into the picture right from the beginning?) Seth was another of Adam and Eve's sons. From Seth's family, years and years later, there came a man named Noah. Noah was a righteous man. God told Noah to build an ark, and he and his family (only eight people) were saved from the flood because water covered the whole earth. Everyone else on earth was destroyed because of sin! (You can read about Noah in Genesis, chapters 6, 7, and 8.) Then, the whole world started over!

One of Noah's sons was named Shem. Many years later, Shem's descendant (great, great, great, etc. grandson) was Abraham. God made three promises to this man, Abraham. Genesis 12:1-7 says that God told him that (1) he was going to be the father of a great nation of people, the Jews, (2) he and his descendants would inherit land, and (3) that some day all nations of the earth would be blessed through his family (by the coming of Jesus centuries later). See? God had a plan!

So, this is how the promise of Abraham, the father of a great nation, came to be true—Abraham became the father of Isaac. Isaac became the father of Jacob. God changed Jacob's name to Israel. Israel (Jacob) had twelve sons. Each of the twelve sons became the father of many descendants and they were called the twelve tribes of Israel. These people became known as the Israelites or Jews, and are sometimes called Hebrews.

Joseph, one of the twelve brothers, was sold into slavery and was taken away to Egypt. God was with Joseph and worked things out for him so well that he became the second most powerful man in Egypt, next to the King! God gave Joseph the ability to understand a dream that the king had. The dream was a warning that a great famine (drought) was coming. There would be seven good years for the Egyptians to store up food, then there would be seven years with no rain and the crops would not grow. During the seven plentiful years, Joseph gathered up food. He laid up food in every city (Genesis 41:47-49).

So, the Egyptians were prepared (ready) for the famine. Once it came, Joseph's eleven brothers, who were back at home, ran out of food. They traveled to Egypt to buy food there. They didn't

recognize Joseph because now he looked like an Egyptian! After a while, Joseph told them who he was and forgave them for selling him as a slave. He realized that God had chosen him to save his family and many other people. Joseph gave them food and told them that they should move all their families to Goshen (in Egypt) where there would be food for them during the famine. So, the Israelites (Joseph's eleven brothers and their wives and children, plus their father, Jacob) all moved there (Genesis 37-50).

After Joseph and his family died, their children and grandchildren and so on, continued to live in Egypt for over 400 years. The Israelites grew into a huge nation of people. At this time, they were made to be slaves of the Egyptians. The Egyptians were very cruel and mean to them. God chose a special man to save them. His name was Moses. With God's help, Moses led the Israelites, 600,000 men plus their wives and children, out of Egypt.

See! Just as God had promised, Abraham's family had become a great nation and it was still growing! You can read the story of Moses leading the Israelite nation out of Egypt in Exodus, chapters 7 through 12. The rest of the book of Exodus tells of the trials and troubles the Israelites had on their way out of Egypt to the Promised Land (the land of Canaan that God had promised to Abraham many years earlier).

While on their journey, God gave the Ten Commandments (and the other laws for the Israelites) to Moses on top of Mount Sinai. These became known as the Law of Moses and all Israelites [Jews] were to obey them. God claimed the Israelite nation to be His special chosen people (holy people) out of all the other nations on earth. God commanded them to make a special tent, which was to be their "place of worship." It was called the Tabernacle. They carried it with them on their journey to Canaan. Men from the tribe of Levi (called Levites) were chosen to work in the Tabernacle.

Moses died and Joshua became the leader of the Israelites. Then, God's second promise to Abraham came true. God gave the Israelite nation the land of Canaan, the land He had promised to Abraham many, many years before. They entered the land and God helped them fight many battles to drive out the people who were already living there. After a time, they divided up the land,

giving sections of it to each of the twelve tribes. Joshua 21:43-45 says, “So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.”

During the years ahead, the Israelites living in the Promised Land went through good and bad times. Sometimes they turned their backs on God and worshiped idols instead. Idols are man-made gods—statues of gold, silver or wood that are worshiped as if they were real. People worshiped gods of the harvest, gods of the sea, gods of the sun, moon and stars, gods of fertility, etc. In the law that God gave to Moses for the Jews to follow, He forbade them to worship idols or make statues (called graven images). God punished them for disobeying Him. He sent their enemies to take over the country and make life miserable for them. The Israelites (Jews) would cry out to God and God would send a judge (a ruler) for the people to lead them in the right way. Then, all was well for a time, until that judge died. Later, they would repeat the whole thing again: worshiping idols, being conquered by their enemies, crying out to God, and being saved by another judge. This went on for years.

Then the people asked for a king. They wanted to be like other nations. That made God sad, because He was their king; however, God allowed them to have one. The first king of Israel was Saul. He did not follow God’s commands and the kingdom was taken from him. The next king was David. This is the one who, when he was a young man, fought and killed the giant, Goliath (I Samuel, chapter 17). David is considered to be the greatest king that Israel ever had. He was called “a man after God’s own heart.” God renewed the promise to Abraham by telling David that through his family, the Savior (Jesus) would someday come into the world. See how the theme “Jesus is coming” continues throughout the Old Testament.

David’s son, Solomon, was the next king. He asked God for wisdom to rule the Israelites and God made Solomon the wisest man that had ever lived! (Read about that in I Kings, chapter 3

and in chapter 4, verses 29-34.) Solomon built the Temple, a beautiful building in which the Israelites worshiped God. This replaced the Tabernacle (the tent which had been their “place of worship”).

Once again the people in the Promised Land began to worship idols. Even King Solomon did. So, God punished them by dividing the kingdom. The ten tribes of Israel to the north were now called Israel and the two tribes to the south were called Judah. The Bible tells us about this time period in which there were many bad kings who led the people to worship idols.

Sometimes, though, there were good kings who tried to lead the people back to God. During this time, God sent prophets. Prophets were men that God chose to deliver special messages to the people. God told the prophets what to say and allowed them to know what would happen in the future. One of the messages God sent through the prophets was (remember this) that some day a Savior (Jesus) would come into the world. (The theme continues!)

The prophets also had another important message. They warned the people that if they did not stop worshiping idols, God would destroy their nation, and those left alive would be taken into slavery by their enemies. And that is exactly what happened. First the northern tribes (Israel) were captured by the Assyrian army and taken into slavery. Then, about a hundred years later, the southern tribes (Judah) were overpowered by a huge army from the country of Babylon. The Babylonians killed many people, burned the Temple and knocked down the wall that surrounded Jerusalem. The Israelites, who survived, were taken away as slaves to live in exile in Babylon.

The people were slaves in Babylon for seventy years as punishment for their idol worship. God loved His people and He forgave them. He allowed them to come back to the Promised Land again. They were happy to return, but they came back to find their cities destroyed and in ruins. They had to rebuild their homes, the Temple and the walls around the city of Jerusalem. They had to learn all over again how to worship God correctly, instead of worshiping idols. The Israelites were now fewer in number, but God saved a remnant (a small part left over) to carry on the

promise that through this nation all people would be blessed (with the coming of Christ). The Jews continued to live in Israel until the coming of Christ several centuries later.

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## **Chapter 4** **The New Testament**

Remember the third promise God made to Abraham? It was that through him all nations of the earth would be blessed. That promise came true when Jesus was born. Jesus was a Jew. He was a descendant of Abraham and from the same family as King David. Look at the genealogy (family history) of Jesus in Matthew 1:1-17. See if you can find the names you have learned about in Jesus' family history: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Judah (one of the twelve sons, or tribes) in verses 2 and 3. Then, look in verse 6 and see King David and then Solomon? Then, verses 11 and 12 show where the exile (the time of being slaves in Babylon) fits into the history of Jesus' family. Scan down through the other names and see who is the last one listed in verse 16—JESUS CHRIST!

The spiritual promise was that this Jesus would bless all nations. That promise came true and is still in effect today! Galatians 3:28 says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (ALL people can be saved through Jesus!) If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed (descendant) and heirs according to the promise. That promise that God made to Abraham thousands of years ago was made to YOU, too! You can be saved from your sins by Abraham's descendant, Jesus Christ!

### **This is Part 2 of the Continuing Theme in the Bible: Jesus is Here!**

The first four books of the New Testament are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They are called the gospels. Gospel means "good news." The good news was (and still is) that the Savior had finally come into the world. Each one of the four books tells the same story: the life of Jesus while He was on earth. Why are there four gospel accounts instead of just one? For example, suppose

you and three other people went on a snow-skiing vacation. When you came back home, someone asked all four of you to write about it. Each of the stories would tell the same thing, but from different points of view. One of you might tell about the icy roads on the way up there. Two of you might tell of the big snowfall the night you got there. Another person might tell of the crowds of people that were there. Three of you might tell about the conditions of the slopes. All four of you would probably include the story of the person in the group who ran into a tree and had to go to the hospital! All four written accounts of the trip would be true stories, but some would include things that others didn't tell, and sometimes, all four would include the same event.

That is the way it was with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. All four men, led by the Holy Spirit, wrote the story of the life of Jesus. Sometimes they wrote about an event that only their book includes. Sometimes the same stories are repeated in another gospel account, or in three of them, or in all four. They do not, however, contradict each other. That is, they are all correct and accurate and, when "blended" together, they give the true picture of what happened when Jesus came to earth.

Although Jesus is the Son of God and called the King of kings, He was born in a very private, humble way (not in a palace like a king). He was born in a stable. His mother was Mary and His father was actually God. (Read Luke, chapters 1 and 2.) Mary's husband, and Jesus' earthly father, was Joseph. Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, but were in Bethlehem at this time to register because it was the law. They had to come to Bethlehem because that was the city of David, and they were his descendants. (Remember that Jesus was to come through the family of David.) Jesus was born while they were in Bethlehem. There was no room for them in the inn, so Jesus was born in a stable! Shepherds came and worshiped Him. Some time later, the wise men who followed a special star found Jesus, worshiped Him and brought Him gifts.

Jesus grew up in Nazareth with His brothers and sisters. At the age of about 30 years old, He began His ministry. He chose twelve apostles. These were men that helped Jesus in His work. God gave Jesus the power to do miracles so that people would believe that He was the Son of God. He walked on water, calmed a thunderstorm, healed many people of their diseases, turned

water into wine and fed 5,000 people with one little boy's lunch! He caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear and even raised people from the dead (Matthew 11:2-6)! None of these things could have happened naturally. They were supernatural events done by God's power.

Jesus went around from town to town teaching people. Many people believed in Him, but some did not. In fact, many Jews were very angry with Him and jealous of Him so they planned to kill Him. They took Him to the government officials and charged Him with crimes that He did not commit. He was sentenced to death on the cross (crucifixion). The soldiers nailed His hands and feet to a wooden cross and He hung there for several hours in severe pain. It was torture and a very cruel way to die. (Read John, chapter 19 and Luke, chapter 23.) However, it was all part of the plan God had to save the world. When Jesus died on the cross, He took OUR punishment. We (all people) are sinners. We are guilty and we deserve to die for disobeying God. But God loves us so much that He allowed His precious Son to die in our place (John 3:16). Jesus paid the debt that we owed. He didn't deserve to die because He was a perfect, sinless man. But He gave up His life because He wanted to—for YOU! He wants you to be forgiven and go to Heaven! What a wonderful gift!

Jesus died and was buried in a tomb. On the third day after His death, He was resurrected (came back to life). He appeared to many people to prove He was no longer dead. He stayed on earth for 40 days and then His followers saw Him go up to Heaven. (Read about the ascension in Luke 24:50-51.) Before He left, He told His apostles and other followers, "... Go into all the world and preach the gospel [good news] to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved [Heaven]; but he who does not believe will be condemned [hell]" (Mark 16:15-16).

### **This is Part 3 of the Continuing Theme of the Bible: Jesus is Coming Again!**

The book of Acts begins at the time when Jesus was taken up to heaven. A few days later the apostles "... were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). They received the Holy Spirit, the Comforter that Jesus had promised to send, and they taught

many people in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost was a Jewish holiday and many people, even visitors from other countries, were in Jerusalem that day. God miraculously gave the apostles the ability to speak in all the different languages of the people who were there!

Peter, one of the apostles, spoke up and told the crowd that Jesus Christ, the man whom they had recently crucified, was really the Son of God! He told them that they had done a terrible thing to make a sinless man die for crimes He did not commit. Then Peter told them that Jesus died in order to keep a promise God had made, and that Jesus' death had been predicted long ago by the prophets of the Old Testament. This was all part of God's plan. He told them that this Jesus had been raised from the dead and now lived in heaven with God.

Many people understood the importance of what Peter was saying. They realized they had sinned greatly by killing the Son of God. They were "cut to the heart [felt guilty and were sorry]." They asked what they should do. "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent and let every one of you be baptized [immersed under water] in the name of Jesus Christ [WHY?] for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' " (Acts 2:38). And that day about 3,000 people were saved. They became Christians (followers of Jesus).

That was the day the church began (Acts, chapter 2). From that day on, the apostles went from town to town teaching people about Jesus. These accounts are in the book of Acts. Many people believed and were baptized, so the church grew in numbers. At that time, there also came persecution for Christians. People who were against the ways of Jesus were cruel to His followers. They put Christians in jail, killed some and tortured others just because they believed in Jesus. One of those who were persecuting Christians was Saul. Saul was making great havoc of the church. As he traveled he suddenly saw a bright light shining around him from heaven. "As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' Then the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ... So he, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do You want me to

do?” Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do’ ” (Acts 9:3-6). Then the Lord told Saul what to do. Saul’s name was later changed to Paul (Acts 13:9). Jesus had a great plan for Paul. Paul, himself, was baptized and became a Christian (Acts 9:18). He became a great preacher, telling of the love and salvation of Jesus. He went from town to town and country to country teaching people how to become Christians and helping them to establish local churches. He was often persecuted for being a follower of Jesus, just like he had formerly persecuted other Christians! He spent several years in prison. During this time, he wrote many letters to the churches that he had helped to establish. These letters later became several of the New Testament books (Romans through Philemon).

Other men also wrote letters to Christians. Their letters became part of the New Testament, too (Hebrews through Jude). The letters contain important instructions about how to live the Christian life.

The last book of the New Testament is Revelation. Revelation is a book of prophecy. It tells us what heaven is like. The message of the book is that, in the end, good will win over evil that is in this world. God will win over Satan (the devil).

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## **Chapter 5** **What Does All This Have to Do With Me?**

Now you know the basic story of the Bible. What does God expect you to do with this information? First of all, you must believe that God exists and that the Bible is actually the word of God. God provided us with the Bible so that He could talk to us and tell us what He expects us to do. So, the bottom line is, do you accept the Bible as God’s word? Do you agree that God is the only authority, that He is the Creator and that you must obey what God tells you to do? If so, then read on to find out what you must do. The Bible says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). That means that you must admit that you, too, are a sinner. The word sin means “to miss the mark,” (as if you were shooting an arrow at a target and missed). Sin is

doing what is wrong, disobeying the laws of God. God is perfect and sinless. We, who are full of sin, are not worthy to live in God's presence (in Heaven) because sin and God do not "mix." Isaiah 59:2 says that sin separates us from God. The punishment for sin is spiritual death, which is hell. II Thessalonians 1:8-9 says, "... taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction [hell] from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

### **Is Hell Real?**

Everlasting destruction—forever and ever being in hell—what a horrible thing! Try to imagine eternity—that's hard—because it seems that everything we know has an end. But eternity lasts forever, on and on, never ending. Since it never ends, there will be no second chances. If you continue to live in sin while on the earth, the Bible says you will be punished in hell. Some people do not believe there is a hell. Some even joke about it. And some do not believe that a loving God would send people to such a horrible place. Remember, it's your own sin that separates you from God and condemns you to hell. And that a "loving God" DID provide a way of escape for you, but if you turn your back on Him, you will not be saved. God has done His part through Jesus' death on the cross, but you must do your part! Is hell real? Let's see what the Bible says about hell:

- Hell is fire (Matthew 5:22). It is called a lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). In Revelation 21:8 it is also described as a "lake which burns with fire and brimstone." Have you ever seen a volcano? The lava is a lake of fire and burning sulfur.
- "... There will be wailing [crying] and gnashing of teeth [like people grind their teeth when they are in great pain]" (Matthew 13:42).
- Matthew 22:13 and 25:30 says that there will be darkness. How can there be darkness if there is fire? Imagine a blind man in a burning building.
- Jesus told a story about a man in Hades. He said that the man was in "torments in Hades." The man begged that someone be

sent back to warn his brothers so they would not come to “this place of torment” (Luke 16:19-31).

- It is eternal. That is, it will last forever and ever. No end. No second chances (II Thessalonians 1:9).
- Those in hell will be “... punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord ...” (II Thessalonians 1:9).
- Who will be there? Matthew 25:41 says that the devil (Satan) will be there. Revelation 21:8 says all of these will go to hell: “... the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable [wicked, evil people], murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers [witchcraft, those who practice magic arts], idolaters [those who worship idols instead of God] and all liars. ...”
- I Corinthians 6:9-10 says, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived [fooled]. Neither fornicators [sexually immoral], nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals [gays and lesbians], nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers [people who falsely accuse and run other people down], nor extortioners [people who cheat] will inherit the kingdom of God.”
- There will even be people there who do believe in God, but have not done what He says. Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”

You see, it would be a horrible thing to spend eternity in hell! Many people refuse to believe that there is a hell. They are like children, hiding their eyes. Just because a person doesn’t believe that it’s there, doesn’t make it go away! Hell is real!

### **Is Heaven Real?**

It is a lot easier to believe in Heaven. Everyone wants to believe that when they die, they will go to a beautiful, wonderful place for eternity. What does the Bible say about Heaven? As you read below, notice the differences between Heaven and Hell:

- **Heaven** is paradise! (II Corinthians 12:4 and Revelation 2:7).  
*Hell:* A place of torment.
- **Heaven** is described as a city of pure gold with foundations of precious stones, the gates were made of pearl, the street of the city was pure gold (Revelation 21:18-21).  
*Hell:* A lake of fire.
- **Heaven** is described as a place of rest (Hebrews 4:10-11).  
*Hell:* A place of agony.
- In **Heaven** there will be no need of the sun or of the moon to shine. "... The Lamb [Jesus] *is* the light" (Revelation 21:23).  
*Hell:* Darkness.
- In **Heaven** there will be no more death, nor sorrow (grieving) nor crying. There will be no more pain (Revelation 21:4)!  
*Hell:* Weeping and gnashing of teeth.
- In **Heaven** there will be nothing that defiles or causes an abomination (Revelation 21:27).  
*Hell:* Full of evil, wicked people.
- In **Heaven** you will have an everlasting kingdom of our Lord (II Peter 1:11). "... He has promised us—eternal life" (I John 2:25).  
*Hell:* Never-ending.
- God lives in **Heaven**. "... the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people ..." (Revelation 21:3).  
*Hell:* The absence of God.
- Jesus lives in **Heaven** and invites us to come (John 14:1-3).  
*Hell:* The devil (Satan) lives there.
- Angels live in **Heaven** (Mark 12:25).  
*Hell:* "... God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell ..." (II Peter 2:4).
- Who else will be in **Heaven**? The saved will be there. That is people who: believe and obey God's word (Acts 16:31),

repent, turn away from their sins (Acts 2:38), confess (admit by saying), “Jesus is the Son of God” (Romans 10:9-10), are baptized (immersed in water to wash away sins) (I Peter 3:21), and who continue to live faithfully for God (Revelation 2:10). (This will be discussed more later.)

*Hell*: Who will be in hell? The wicked, evil people, unbelievers, and those who do not obey God, even “religious” people who do not correctly follow God’s word.

So, you see, the good news is that **Heaven** is real, too! Now that you know what the Bible says about Heaven and Hell, where do you want to spend eternity? You only have a choice as long as you live in this life. Once you die, your opportunity to get in a right relationship with God will be over. Also remember that no one knows when the Second Coming of Jesus will be. It could be today! Are you ready? Keep reading.

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## Chapter 6 What Do I Have to Do to Be Saved?

Since we are all sinners, and sin and God cannot exist together, then how can a person be saved from hell? What do you have to do to get to heaven? Jesus paid the price for your sins when He died on the cross. That is God’s gift of mercy (forgiving you even though you don’t deserve it). But now, you must do your part. You must come into contact with that saving blood of Jesus. It is that sacrifice of Jesus’ blood that saves you! John 1:29 says that Jesus takes away the sins of the world. Ephesians 1:7 says that forgiveness of sins comes through the blood of Jesus.

**Step 1. Hear and understand the word of God:** You are taking this step right now by learning about the Bible and what God’s will is for you. You must believe that the Bible, and *only* the Bible, is the authority for telling us what God wants us to do, not what men say, not what any council or board decides, not man-made traditions, but **ONLY** God’s word. Read it. Study it.

Pray to God and ask Him to help you understand it and He will (James 1:5-6)! Romans 10:13-14 says, “For ‘**WHOEVER CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED.**’ How

then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" Then, verse 17 says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." So, when you read the Bible and hear (understand) the good news of Jesus, it produces FAITH. James 1:22 says that we should not only be hearers of the word, but that we must do what it says! Read on.

**Step 2. Believe!** What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the SUBSTANCE of things HOPED for, the EVIDENCE of things not seen." Read the whole chapter of Hebrews 11. It tells how great men in the Old Testament believed in God and showed it in their lives. Faith means believing that God is real and alive and "in charge." Faith is believing that the Bible is really His word. Faith is believing that Jesus Christ, that baby born in a manger, is truly the Son of God. It is believing that Jesus is the Savior, YOUR Savior!

Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Again, in John 8:24, Jesus said, "... if you do not believe that I am He [God's Son], you will die in your sins [go to hell]." Mark 16:16 says that people who do not believe will be condemned. So, it is very important to believe in God and in Jesus. Do you believe?

**Step 3. Repent of your sins:** What does it mean to repent of your sins? It means you must first be sorry for the wrong things you have done. It also means that you make a decision to change and do what is right. It is a change of mind and a change of heart. It is like driving north on a road and then making a U-turn and driving south. It is a commitment to try to be the kind of person God wants you to be. Yes, you will fail at times. It doesn't mean that you will be perfect, but it is a promise to TRY to be perfect. It is a decision to get out of "the business of sinning" and change your lifestyle to honor God. Luke 13:3 says, "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish [die in your sins]." Acts 17:30 says that God COMMANDS all men everywhere to repent. II Corinthians 7:10 says, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death."

Here is a story from the New Testament that explains repentance. Luke 19 tells of a short man named Zacchaeus. He heard that Jesus was coming through town and he wanted to meet Him, but he could not see over the crowds, so he climbed up in a tree. When Jesus saw him, He said, “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house” (Luke 19:5). Zacchaeus was thrilled and took Jesus home with him. Zacchaeus was a tax collector and was wealthy. Many tax collectors of that day got rich by charging too much for taxes and putting the extra money in their pockets. Zacchaeus repented of doing wrong. He not only felt sorry, but he changed his life. Verses 8-9 say, “Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, ...’ ” Zacchaeus changed his ways to follow Jesus. Are you willing to do that?

**Step 4. Confess that Jesus is the Son of God:** You must also confess (say with your own mouth) that you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Many Christians made that confession and were killed for it. They were thrown to the lions or burned or beheaded. Jesus, Himself, confessed that He was truly the Son of God, and they killed Him for it (Luke 22:66-71). You must prove your love for Jesus by standing up for Him and not being afraid to say that you believe. Some people may laugh at you or disagree with you or stop being friends with you because you stand up for Jesus. Romans 10:9-10 says, “... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness [counted as ‘not guilty’ of sin] and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Jesus said in Matthew 10:32-33, “Therefore whoever confesses Me [stands up for Me] before men, him I will also confess [stand up for him] before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me [is ashamed of Me, turns his back on Me] before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.” Are you willing to stand up for Jesus and tell others that you believe in Him?

**Step 5. Be Baptized:** In the Greek language in which the New Testament was originally written, the word “baptize” means “to immerse, to dip, or to plunge.” Baptism means being immersed, completely covered in water. Why does God require us to be

baptized? Colossians 2:12 says it is symbolic of when Jesus died, was buried in the grave, and when He arose from the dead. When you are baptized and go down into the water, it is a burial of your old life of sin. Then, when you come up out of the water, you are raised up in a new life, the Christian life. Your sins are forgiven.

It is explained that way in Romans 6:3-4: “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Some believe they can be baptized by having water sprinkled on them or poured on them. Think about that. Baptism is a burial. When you bury someone who has died, do you sprinkle a little dirt on them, or do you pour a little dirt on them? No! You completely cover them. That’s how baptism is to be performed. When the Bible tells of John baptizing people, it says he was baptizing people at Aenon near Salim because “... there was much water there. ...” (John 3:23).

Would he have needed a place where there was much water if he was just going to sprinkle or pour water on their heads? No. He could have done that in a house with a bowl or pitcher of water. Also, in Mark 1:9-10, when Jesus Himself came to be baptized by John, it says, “It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.” So, if Jesus was coming up from the water, then He had to have gone down into the water! Therefore, we can conclude that to be baptized you must be submerged under water.

Why must you be baptized? Being baptized is what puts you in contact with the saving blood of Jesus. How precious is that saving blood! If you do not accept this great gift, it is like medicine in a bottle. What if you were deathly sick and the doctor gave you medicine to cure you? If you left the medicine in the bottle and never took it, you could die! The medicine would do you no good if it stayed in the bottle. Just the same, the blood

of Jesus cannot save you unless you come into contact with it through baptism. That is God's grace, united with your faith, demonstrated in obedience! How can so many believers in Christ stop short of this importance step? Some say that they have accepted Jesus as their Savior (they believe) and they feel that at that point, they are saved. What does the Bible say? Mark 16:16 says, "He who believes AND is baptized will be saved. ..." Acts 22:16 says that **baptism** washes away your sins.

Also, in I Peter 3:21-22, the Bible says, "There is also an antitype [a symbol] which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh [like when you take a bath], but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him." How could the Scripture be written any clearer than to specifically state that baptism saves you? So, since you come into contact with Jesus' saving blood at baptism, then you must obey God and be baptized.

It is a commandment in Acts 2:38: "... Repent and let every one of you [that includes you and me] be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. ..." Mark 16:16 says, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." Read on. There's more!

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## **Chapter 7** **Examples of People Being Saved**

To make these steps to salvation clearer, especially about baptism, let's read about some people in the New Testament who wanted to know how to be saved. Pay close attention to what they were told and what they actually did.

### **Acts 2:14-41: 3,000 People are Saved in One Day!**

After Jesus died and went back to Heaven, His apostles went about preaching the good news of salvation. A crowd of people gathered in Jerusalem at a feast called Pentecost. Just a few weeks

earlier, these people, with the help of some evil men, had been a part of the mob that had crucified Jesus. Peter spoke to them. By using the Old Testament, he explained to them that this Jesus whom they had crucified was no criminal and no ordinary man. He was the Son of God! The people believed what Peter said, and they were cut to the heart. That means that they were shocked and sorry.

They asked the apostles, "... 'What shall we do?' [They knew they were guilty of sin.] Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' " (Acts 2:37-38). "And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation.' Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them [became Christians]" (Acts 2:40-41).

### **Acts 8:9-13: Simon and Others are Saved**

Acts 8 tells of a preacher named Philip. Philip met a man named Simon and preached to him and to others. Philip told them the good news about Jesus. Verses 12 and 13 say, "But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done."

### **Acts 8:26-39: An Ethiopian Man is Saved**

Another time, this preacher named Philip, met an important government official from the country of Ethiopia. The official had been to Jerusalem and was now on his way home. He was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah, part of the Old Testament. Philip asked, "... 'Do you understand what you are reading?' And he said, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him" (Acts 8:30-31).

So Philip climbed up into the chariot with him and explained the words that the man had been reading. The Scriptures he was

reading were prophecies about Jesus, and Philip told the man the good news that Jesus had already come to earth and died to save people from their sins. (So this official heard the word.)

“Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch [man] said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ [That was his confession of faith!] So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him” (Acts 8:36-38).

(Did Philip sprinkle water on him or pour it on him? No. They went down into the water.) Then the eunuch went on his way rejoicing! Why? Because he was saved!

### **Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-16: Saul is Saved**

Saul was one of the Jews who disapproved of people becoming Christians. He did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. He went around persecuting Christians, putting many of them in prison because they believed in Jesus. One day while he was on the way to the city of Damascus to arrest more Christians, a very bright light shined down on him from Heaven. “Then he [Saul] fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’ ... ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do’ ” (Acts 9:4-6).

Saul got up and found that he was blind. The people with him led him into town. Meanwhile, the Lord appeared to a man named Ananias and told him to go to Saul. Ananias was afraid of Saul because he had heard about him—how he was arresting Christians and putting them in prison. God told Ananias, “... Go, for he is a chosen vessel [helper] of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles [non-Jews], kings, and the children of Israel [Jews]” (Acts 9:15). Ananias obeyed God, and went to see Saul. He told Saul that God had sent him. He said, “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

Immediately, Saul was baptized. From that time on, Saul (whose name was changed to Paul) went from city to city telling the good news of Jesus and baptizing people instead of arresting them!

### **Acts 10:1-48: Cornelius and His Family are Saved**

There was a Roman soldier, a centurion, named Cornelius. He and all his family were sincere about loving God, fearing God, and worshiping God. Cornelius gave generously to people in need. He prayed to God regularly. It appears that Cornelius was already a religious man, doesn't it? But, even though he was a good man and worshiped God, he was not yet saved. How do we know that? Because, beginning in Acts 10, verse 4, the Bible says that God heard his prayers and wanted Cornelius to meet the apostle Peter to find out what to do to be saved! Verses 30-33 say that Cornelius did what God said to do, and Peter told Cornelius about Jesus.

At first, only Jews became followers of Christ (Christians). But Cornelius was a Gentile (not born into a Jewish family). God showed Peter that it was okay for Gentiles to be saved, too, because God's plan was to offer salvation to ALL people. Acts 10:48 says that Peter commanded them (Cornelius and his household) to be baptized in the name of the Lord. So, if Cornelius was already saved, just by being good and loving God, why was someone sent to baptize him and his household? Because he was not saved until he was baptized (Mark 16:16). Remember that Jesus says salvation happens at baptism.

### **Acts 16:11-15: Lydia and Her Family are Saved**

A group of women were meeting to worship beside a river. Paul spoke to them about Jesus. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

Acts 16:15 says, "And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay. So she persuaded us.'" Once again we see that someone who was already a worshiper of God was told to be baptized. Baptism is necessary for salvation!

## **Acts 16:25-34: The Jailer and His Family are Saved**

Paul and his co-worker, Silas, were put in prison because they preached the good news of Jesus. They were severely beaten, put into the inner part of the prison, and their feet were fastened in stocks so that they couldn't get away. About midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing songs to God. (They had just been beaten! Can you imagine? Would you have been singing?)

Suddenly there was an earthquake. All the prison doors flew open and everybody's chains came loose. The jailer woke up and drew his sword to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. "But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, 'Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.' Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' So they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household' " (Acts 16:28-31). Was that enough? No, read on. Then they told the jailer and his family the story of Jesus. "And he [the jailer] took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes [wounds]. [The jailer was sorry and he repented]. And immediately he and all his family were baptized" (Acts 16:33). The jailer was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and all his household. In every instance, those who believed were baptized.

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### **Chapter 8** **More Information About Salvation**

You just read many examples of people being baptized and becoming Christians. Those people were old enough to hear and understand the good news of Jesus, old enough to believe in Him, old enough to repent of their sins, old enough to confess their faith, and then were baptized. Can a baby or a little child understand fully what Jesus has done for them? Can a baby repent of its sins? No, a baby doesn't know right from wrong. Can a baby confess his or her faith in Jesus? No, they are too young to talk like that or to understand what it means! Babies have no need of baptism to save them because, at that point, they are not lost. They are not guilty of sin.

In Mark 10:14-16, Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” Some say that children are born with the sins of their father or that they are born guilty of the original sin of Adam, (the first man in the Garden of Eden). But that’s not what God says.

In Ezekiel 18:20, the Bible says, “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.” So, babies and little children are in a safe state until they grow old enough to understand what sin is, and old enough to understand about faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. Once a person reaches that time in his or her life, and is convinced that he is a sinner in need of God, he is ready to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.

All the steps of salvation are important. You must obey all of the commands that tell how to be saved. One verse says if you believe, you will be saved. Another says if you confess, you will be saved. Another says if you repent and are baptized you will be saved. All of these scriptures put together, plus the examples of the people you just read about give us a clear picture of what to do to be saved. Ephesians 2:8 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” What a wonderful gift!

Hear the word + Believe in Jesus + Repent of your sins + Confess that Jesus is Lord + Be baptized = SALVATION.

Remember the combination locks that you had on your locker at school or in gym class? Think of using the “formula” for salvation just like using a combination lock. The combination may be to turn the dial right to 25, left to 16, and then right again to 31. You know that if you leave out a number, the lock won’t open. If you turn the dial to any wrong number, it won’t open either. Just the same, if you leave out any part of the plan of salvation, you won’t be saved. Or, if you change any part of the plan of salvation, you won’t be saved. You must do it God’s way only! Once you have been baptized, your life as a Christian

begins. You are born again (John 3:3), starting over as a new person with a clean slate. Romans 6:4 says, “Therefore we were buried with Him thorough baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Baptism washes your sins away, as we have already read in Acts 22:16. Once you are a Christian, you must continue to obey God by living a faithful Christian life. Read the New Testament every day to find out more about how to live the Christian life. In Revelation 2:10, God says, “... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life [Heaven].”

Some people think that once they have been saved, they can never be lost, but be careful! Galatians 5:4 says that a person can fall from grace. That means if a person turns their back on God and goes back into the world, living a constant sinful lifestyle again, they can lose their relationship with God. Hebrews 10:26-27 says, “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation [hell] which will devour the adversaries.”

Notice the words: willfully keep on sinning. Again, that means sinning on purpose. No one is perfect and even after baptism, there will be times when you fail and do things that are wrong. That is not deliberately sinning, that is a temporary failure. When sin does occur after baptism, the way to keep your relationship right with God is to pray to God for His forgiveness, and to repent (turn away from sin) and try harder not to do it anymore. I John 1:7-9 tells us this: “But if we walk in the light [live as a Christian] as He [Jesus] is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins [admit them to God], He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

It is important to know that God gives us the power to overcome temptation. He helps us as we try to live a good, clean life. I Corinthians 10:13 says, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with

the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”

Be aware of what your temptations are. (You may never be tempted to shoplift, as some people are, or to murder someone, but you may be tempted to use bad language, or tell lies, etc.) Satan uses your weaknesses against you. Pray and ask God to help you win over Satan. Every day ask God to forgive you. He has promised He will! Even a Christian cannot live a perfect, sinless life, but he can live a forgiven life because Jesus paid for our sins. See what power there is in the cross? Remember this: The Christian lives “in the land of beginning again!”

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## Chapter 9 The Importance of the Church

When you are baptized into the saving blood of Jesus you are added to the church. Acts 2:47 says, “... And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Galatians 3:26-27 says, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” So, the same process that saves you from your sins when you are baptized, automatically adds you to the Lord’s church.

A famous singer was once quoted as saying, “I have a very close relationship with God, but I don’t do the church thing.” How confused she is! You cannot separate being saved and being in the church. The church is not the church building. The church is the people who are saved. When you are saved, you are a member of the Lord’s church. Sometimes the church is called the body of Christ, and Christ Himself is the head of the church. Picture that illustration! Ephesians 1:22-23, “And He [God] put all things under His [Jesus] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body. ...”

Ephesians 5:23 and Colossians 1:18 also say that Christ is the head of the church. I Corinthians 12:13 says that we are baptized into one body. Galatians 3:27 says that we are baptized into Christ. Being “in Christ” means being a member of His church.

Jesus loves His church. He bought and paid for it with His own blood on the cross (Acts 20:28)!

All spiritual blessings are in Christ. Those outside of the body of Christ (outside the church) are not eligible for these spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3). For example, some of the spiritual blessings are: salvation from sin, being part of a family of believers, the power of prayer, the promise of Heaven and receiving the Holy Spirit to help you.

The word “church” is used in two ways in the New Testament. The first way it is used is to mean the universal church, that is, the whole church that Jesus died for. Remember, the church is not the building; it is the people. So, all people who are baptized believers, worldwide, are the church. The other way the word “church” is used is to mean a local congregation; a group of believers meeting together in a certain town or place. So either way, the church is the body of believers, whether in the sense of ALL baptized believers in the whole world, or in the sense of the local assembly of baptized believers in a town.

Here is an illustration: Everyone is familiar with McDonald’s restaurants. In the universal sense, there is the multimillion dollar company which we call McDonald’s. Someone might say, “I bought stock in McDonald’s,” meaning the company. Then there are the local restaurants in cities and towns, which we also call McDonald’s. “Let’s go to McDonald’s for lunch” means the local restaurant.

Now, here are two examples of how the word “church” is used in the Bible: (1) In the **universal** sense, Ephesians 5:23 says, “... Christ is head of the church [all the saved, world-wide]; and He is the Savior of the body.” (2) In the **local** sense, look at the first two verses of the book of Philemon. That book is a letter that Paul wrote to a man named Philemon, and he starts with this greeting: “... To Philemon, our beloved friend and fellow laborer ... and to the church in your house.” You see, that letter was addressed to a local group of Christians.

The Bible tells us that there is to be only one church (world-wide), the church that is in the New Testament. Ephesians 4:4-6 says, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in

one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” Colossians 1:18 says, “And He [Jesus Christ] is the head of the body, the church. ...” So, local congregations of the church are not different denominations. They should be alike, as long as they are practicing Christianity according to the New Testament. You might ask, “Why are there so many different kinds of churches?” Actually, you wonder why there are so many denominations (Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Assemblies of God, Disciples of Christ, Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, Nazarenes, Episcopal, Presbyterian, etc.).

The word “denomination” means division. Just like a denominator in a fraction (the bottom number) is the number that you divide by. The figure  $\frac{3}{4}$  means 3 divided by 4. So, if there is only one church, according to Ephesians 4:4, why are there so many denominations (divisions)?

The answer is that people base their religion on different things. For instance, some people believe they must obey both the Old and New Testament. However, the Old Testament is the law of Moses. It was written for the Jews. It was replaced by the new law of Christ when Jesus died on the cross. The laws of the Old Testament applied to the people living under the law at that time. But, since we are now living in the Christian age, we are not bound to the old law any more.

Here is an illustration: people of the United States have lived under three different laws. At first, American colonists were under British rule and had to obey their laws. Then we fought a war and gained our independence from Britain, and lived under a set of laws called the Articles of Confederation.

Years later, those laws were replaced by the Constitution. That is the law we are still under today as Americans. Wouldn’t it be silly to obey the British laws of the 1600’s today? Do you pay taxes to Great Britain? Of course not! We aren’t under that law any more! What if you refused to get a driver’s license today because, under the Articles of Confederation, no one had to? How silly! There wasn’t a law about driver’s licenses then because there were no cars! See, the laws of that day are dead. They don’t apply to us any more. Americans must obey only the laws of the Constitution!

In the Bible, there were also three periods of time when the people were under three different laws. During Adam and Noah and Abraham's time, they were under what is called the Patriarchal law. Patriarchs were the fathers; the head of the families. Each head of the family was the religious leader. However, another law and another form of worship came about in Moses' time. It was the Ten Commandments and the other laws that are found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. All Jews lived under that law. Even hundreds of years later, Jesus, who was a Jew, lived under Moses' law.

However, Jesus was teaching, while He was living on the earth, that the law was about to change. God is the only one who can change God's laws, and God gave Jesus, His Son, authority to change it. "... All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). That was Jesus' mission on earth. So, the Law did change when Jesus died on the cross. At that point, a person no longer had to be a Jew to be one of God's chosen, saved people. A person only had to become a Christian (follower of Christ), and anyone, whether he was born a Jew or Gentile, could become a Christian (Galatians 3:28).

The new law, the law of Christ, is still in effect today until Jesus comes again. So we are now living under the Law of Christ, right now, today. Then why do some people teach that we must obey the Old Testament, the Law of Moses, given to the Jews? That law is no longer binding.

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

Romans 7:6 says, "But now we have been delivered from the law [the Law of Moses], having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter [Old Testament]."

Hebrews 8:7 says, "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second." Verse 13

says, “In that He says, ‘A new covenant,’ [New testament] He has made the first [Old Testament] obsolete. ...”

Should anyone base their religious practices on the Old Testament? No, but many do. Some mix the Old Testament way of worship with the New Testament way. For example, the Law of Moses commanded that worship be conducted by priests. However, when the New Law began at the cross, that changed. Burning incense, tithing, instrumental music in worship, having an altar—all these are commands of worship in the Old Testament and are not in the New. Another example of this is keeping the Sabbath (worshiping on Saturday instead of Sunday). That was the day of worship under Moses’ law, but the Christians in the New Testament worshiped on the first day of the week, Sunday (Acts 20:7). Another reason there are so many denominations is because some people base their beliefs on what men say, even if it is different from the Bible.

Sometimes groups of men (leaders meeting in a council) vote on doctrine and make laws for people of their religion. Some teachings that start out as men’s opinions become traditions handed down over the years. Then people who do not read the Bible obey these man-made laws, thinking they are obeying God’s laws!

Another danger is that many people blindly follow leaders who are false teachers. They think that surely these religious men know the Bible and are telling it to them correctly, but that is where the real danger comes in! Every person must learn the truth by reading the Bible. You cannot get to heaven based on who your preacher is or who your parents are. Each person is responsible for his own salvation. The excuse that you were led astray by a false teacher will not excuse you on the Judgment Day!

Romans 14:10-12 says, “... For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.’ So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.” Remember that we must always base our religious practices ONLY on what God tells us to do, not what man says. What does the Bible say about this? Revelation 22:18-19 says, “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that

are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life [heaven]. ...” Listen to what Jesus said in Mark 7:6-9: “... Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ... He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.’ ”

Jesus clearly stated here that we must follow God’s word, not man’s. It doesn’t matter what any man or council or church board decides is right, it only matters what God says in the Bible. In Galatians 1:6-8, Paul was writing to some Christians in Galatia and he wrote: “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert [change, distort] the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” We are to follow only the teachings of the New Testament. The Bible clearly says that not everyone will be saved. There will even be religious people who are lost because they did not do things God’s way. In Matthew 7:21, Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.”

How do men dare change God’s word? And, why would anyone think they can improve on God’s plan? Because of the warnings clearly stated in the New Testament, we must be very careful to follow ONLY God’s word in deciding how we worship and how we become saved. If every person and every church followed ONLY the New Testament, and nothing else, there would be unity! Think about this: When you plant corn seeds, what you get is corn. Not tomatoes. Not apples. Just corn. In the same way, if you plant the seed of the word of God, and nothing more or nothing less, it will produce the same results anywhere at any time—the New Testament Church!

How can you know for sure that you are worshiping in the correct church? Consider every act of worship, where the doctrine or “creed” comes from, the name of the church, how to correctly

select leaders of the church, how to become a member and what the mission of the church is. Then, compare the practices of the church where you attend with the New Testament church. As we have stated earlier, there will be religious people who are lost (Matthew 7:21-23), so you must be very careful to worship God's way, not man's way. The next section will explain this further.

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## Chapter 10 How to Find the New Testament Church Today

A dressmaker uses a pattern to cut fabric to exact specifications so that when she sews the pieces together, the garment will fit properly. An architect draws a blueprint (a pattern) by which the construction workers build a house. If the construction workers do not go strictly by the pattern, the house will not turn out right. We must view the New Testament as a strict pattern of how to worship and how to live the Christian life. To do this, one must understand the law of exclusion. That means that one should respect the silence of the Scriptures as well as the commandments. For example, if I gave you a recipe for oatmeal cookies, it would say to put in so much oatmeal, so much sugar, so much flour, etc. But I would not have to write on the card, "Don't put in any bacon and don't put in any pickles and don't put in any hot peppers and don't put in any ketchup," and so on and so on. I wouldn't have to list everything NOT to put in the cookies because the recipe (the pattern) would tell you what TO put in. That excludes everything else! Doesn't that make sense?

In just the same way, if we learn to do just what God tells us TO DO, we will not need for Him to list all the things NOT to do. The silence of the Scriptures is to be respected. God gave Noah specific instructions (a pattern) of how to build the ark. Noah obeyed (Genesis 6:13-16). God also gave Moses specific instruction (a pattern) for the building of the Tabernacle (the movable building in which the Israelites worshiped). Moses obeyed.

Paul wrote to a young preacher named Timothy and said, "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 1:13).

I Corinthians 4:6 tells us "... that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other." The Bible is our instruction manual. What would happen if the workers on the assembly line in an airplane factory did not follow the instructions? Would you want to fly on that plane?

The Bible is our guide. You use a map to find the right way to go on a long trip. God's word is our map to heaven, but we must follow it exactly! Reading the Bible makes us spiritually healthy. What if a pharmacist did not follow exactly the doctor's instructions when you went to get your prescriptions filled? Would you feel safe taking those medications? We must NOT depart from the pattern of the New Testament.

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

Once again, consider what is written in Galatians 1:6-8: "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed." In Galatians 1:11-12, Paul goes on to say, "But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ." So, if we are to follow the pattern of the New Testament church, then let's find out what that pattern is! Read on.

### **How Did the New Testament Church Choose Its Leaders?**

We have already learned in a previous section that Christ is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 5:23). Each local congregation of the church is to have elders (Acts 20:17). Elders are also called shepherds or overseers (Acts 20:28). Sometimes,

in the King James Version and the American Standard Version, the word is translated as “bishops.” All these names refer to the same group of leaders, the elders. Elders direct the affairs of the church (I Timothy 5:17).

How does a congregation decide who its elders will be? Again, the pattern is in the New Testament. I Timothy 3:2-7 says “A bishop then must be blameless [not infallible which is impossible, but consistently living the Christian life], the husband of one wife [so an elder MUST be a man, not a woman], temperate [moderate in all he does, not living in extremes], sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine [drunkenness], not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice [a new Christian], lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil [doomed to hell]. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” Paul also told Titus to appoint elders in every city and then Paul lists the qualifications of elders again (Titus 1:5-9).

Elders only have rule over their own congregation, not over many congregations. In I Peter 5:1-2, Peter, writing a letter to Christians, speaks to “The elders who are among you ...” and encourages them to “shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly.” Then, in verse 4, he reminds them that Jesus (not Peter or any other man) is the Chief Shepherd (the ONLY head of the church). See also John 10:14-16 where Jesus says He is the “Good Shepherd” and there is only one. So, there is to be no “head elder” or any man exalted above the other elders. All rule together equally. Each congregation of the church is to have its own eldership. Each congregation is to be self-governing. The “headquarters” of the church is in Heaven only, not anywhere on earth. The New Testament does not authorize a centralized government over all the churches.

In Philippians 1:1, Paul and Timothy write, “... to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi [a local congregation in a

city], with the bishops [elders] and deacons.” That brings us to a discussion of deacons. The word deacon means “servant.” Deacons work under the direction of the elders. Their job is to be of service to the church.

The apostles said, “... It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:2-3). These seven men were chosen to help feed the widows so the apostles could be about more spiritual matters.

I Timothy 3:8-12 gives the qualifications of deacons. “Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery [deep truths] of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons being found blameless. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate [must not do things to excess], faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife [so then a deacon must be a man, not a woman], ruling their children and their own houses well.”

### **By What Name Was the New Testament Church Known?**

Because there was only ONE church during the time of the New Testament, the church was most often referred to simply as “the church.” Acts 8:1 says a great persecution broke out against “the church.” Acts 9:31 says, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. ...” And there are many other references like those. In Romans 16:16, the local congregations are known as the “churches of Christ.”

The letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians begins with the greeting, “To the church of God which is at Corinth ...” (I Corinthians 1:2). In Hebrews 12:23, the church is referred to as the “church of the firstborn.” (The firstborn is Jesus, God’s first and only Son.) All of these names are authorized in scripture. Individual members of the church were called Christians (Acts 11:26). Sometimes they were referred to as “disciples” (Acts 14:21-22). Some may ask, “What difference does it make to call a church by one name or another?” Remember, we are trying to follow the pattern set in the New Testament. The name “church of Christ”

honors Christ only, not some other human founder. Christ is the head of the church, and the name given in Scripture honors Him as such. This promotes unity throughout the churches. Using the name of men creates division.

For example, read what is said about this in I Corinthians 1:10-13: “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas’ [Peter], or ‘I am of Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” See? Division is wrong. Using the name of Christ, the head of the church, to identify the church creates unity.

### **What is the Church’s Creed?**

A creed is “a formal summary of religious beliefs; an authoritative statement of doctrine.” In other words, it is the code of rules and standards by which the church is run. Once again, let us look at the pattern laid out for us in the New Testament. II Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

In II Peter 1:2-3, we read, “... as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness [living like God], through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.” From these scriptures, we can conclude that God has provided us with everything we need to know by giving us the Bible. The Bible, therefore, is our only creed.

Any laws or demands added by men are not approved by God. II Timothy 4:3-4 warns us of this: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” The verses in Mark 7:6-13

are another warning: "... This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. ... making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. ... And many such things you do." So, we must conclude that no laws or rules made by man are to be the creed of the church. Instead, the word of God (the Bible) is our only creed.

## **How Does a Person Become a Member of the Church?**

We have discussed in an earlier section that you must have faith in Jesus (Hebrews 11:6), repent of your sins (Acts 2:38), confess Jesus as your Savior (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized (immersed in water) to wash away your sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16). At the point of baptism, a person is added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47).

There is no authority in Scripture for the church or any church leaders to vote on a person's right to be in the church or not. According to the New Testament pattern, a person was automatically added to the church (the saved) when they were baptized.

## **What is the Purpose of the Church?**

Let's see what the purpose of the New Testament church is:

1. Ephesians 3:10-11 says, "To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

2. Galatians 6:10 says, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." James 1:27 says, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

3. Ephesians 4:14-16 says, "... we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom [Jesus]

the whole body [the church], joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” So we can see that the task or work of the New Testament church was to: (1) preach about and spread the word of God, (2) to help the needy and (3) to edify (build up in love) each of its members.

## **How are We to Worship?**

What does the New Testament say about how we are to worship? Jesus said in John 4:23-24, “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit [with the right attitude] and in truth [the right way].”

Remember Cornelius? He was the Roman centurion in Acts 10? He had the right spirit because he feared God, prayed regularly and gave to those in need, but he didn’t have the truth. He didn’t know about salvation through Jesus and the need for baptism, so Peter taught him.

Now consider the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. They were very religious and studied the Old Law carefully and they even knew that Jesus claimed to be the Savior and the Son of God. But their worship was in vain because they did not have the right spirit or attitude (Matthew 15:1-9). They had no faith in Jesus to forgive sins. They depended on man-made traditions in their worship. So we can see that a true worshiper must have the correct attitude (spirit) and also worship in the right way (truth).

## **The Pattern of New Testament Worship is Described in Scripture:**

1. **Teaching and preaching:** Acts 2:42 tells of the early church who devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread [the Lord’s Supper] and to prayer. We read in Matthew 28:19-20 that Jesus told His disciples to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have

commanded you; and lo, I am with you always. ...” Also, Acts 20:7 tells us that “... on the first day of the week [Sunday] ... Paul spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.”

2. **Praying:** Prayer is the way we talk to God. Jesus taught His disciples how to pray in Matthew 6:9-13. Read that prayer in your Bible. Understand, though, that Jesus told His disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come,” because it had not come at that time. It has come now, so we don’t need to ask for that any more. Jesus’ kingdom is the church, which was established on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Acts 2:42, lists prayer as an act of worship. I Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Pray without ceasing.”

Paul wrote to Timothy, a fellow preacher, about the need for prayer. In I Timothy 2:1-5, he says, “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”

Paul, writing to the church in Ephesus, said, “... praying always with all prayer and supplications in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18). So prayer must be done in reverence (with respect) for God, and it must be from the heart, and it must be offered in the name of Jesus (Colossians 3:17).

3. **Giving:** I Corinthians 16:1-2 sets the example (pattern) of giving for us today: “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.”

In the Old Testament, the Jews were under the Law of Moses. That law commanded that they tithe, or give a tenth of their income (money, crops, etc.) to the Lord (Numbers 18:25-26). We are not under that law. Remember, we studied that the Old Law has been replaced by the new covenant (New Testament) which is

the law of Christ. So, how much should you give? II Corinthians 9:7 says, “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”

4. **The Lord’s Supper:** In the United States, we Americans celebrate Memorial Day in May. That special day is set aside to honor any and all soldiers who gave their lives for our freedom. In a way, that is like the Lord’s Supper. It is a special time set aside to honor Jesus for giving His life on the cross to pay for our freedom—freedom from punishment for our sins.

What is the pattern set up in the New Testament for this special ceremony called the Lord’s Supper, or sometimes called communion (I Corinthians 10:16)? Once again, you can read Acts 2:42. One of the acts of worship listed there was the breaking of bread, which is the Lord’s Supper. Acts 20:6-7 tells us this was done by the early church on the first day of the week (Sunday). Acts 20:7 says, “Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread. . . .” There are four places where you can read about the purpose of the Lord’s Supper. Three of them are Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:23-24 and Luke 22:14-20. The fourth one is in I Corinthians 11:23-29 in which Paul says, “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.”

The Lord’s Supper is Given in Two Parts:

(a) First the unleavened bread is passed to you. It represents the body of Jesus which hung on the cross. The bread is unleavened (containing no yeast, like “mazo” crackers) because

this was the Passover supper that Jesus was eating with His disciples, and only unleavened bread (made without yeast) was served during Passover. Remember, Jesus still lived under Jewish law and so to observe the Passover was the right thing for Him to do at that time. We do not observe the Passover today because it is a part of the Old Law, not the New Law of Christ under which we now live. The New Law began at the cross. So, instead of the Passover, Christians observe the Lord's Supper.

(b) The second part is the "fruit of the vine" (grape juice) which represents the blood that Jesus shed on the cross to pay for our sins. As we partake of each of these, we are to remember what they represent, honoring Jesus for His great sacrifice of love.

**5. Singing:** Another act of worship in which the New Testament church participated was singing. Singing is a way of praising God. In all the Bible verses quoted below, notice that only vocal music (singing) is commanded. Singing accompanied by instruments of music (pianos, organs, guitars, horns, etc.) is never mentioned in the New Testament. (Instruments of music were used in worship in the Old Testament, but remember that is a dead law. We are now under the New Law only.) Let's see what the pattern for singing in worship was in the church of the first century. Ephesians 5:18-20 says, "... but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

I Corinthians 14:15 says, "What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding."

James 5:13 says, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms." Some might say that if instrumental music is not forbidden, then it is allowed. However,

there is a “law of exclusion” applied here. Just like with the Lord’s Supper, the Bible does not say “don’t serve potatoes and don’t serve cake and don’t serve lamb chops and don’t serve bananas.” It is not necessary to list all the things NOT to have, when what God expects us to have is clearly stated: the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine.

In this way, the Bible does not need to say, “do not use a piano, do not use a guitar, do not use an organ and do not use drums” because what we are supposed to do is clearly stated: sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord. If the command was generic (all-inclusive and general, not specific), that is, if the command was only to make music, and that was all that was said, then any kind of music would be okay. However, the command is not generic, it is specific (exact); and that is, to sing.

Remember, in each act of worship and in every aspect of the church, it is a MUST to always follow the pattern that God gave us. No one has authority to change God’s laws. Do you love God? I John 5:3 says, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.”

## **Conclusion**

You have learned who God is. You have learned about His Son, Jesus. You know “the big picture” of what the Bible is about. And, now you know what God expects you to do with this information. Think about these things. Pray about them. Ask God to help you have the courage to do what is right. Honor God and honor Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross by accepting His wonderful gift of salvation! And do it God’s way, according to the pattern laid out in the New Testament. It is the most important thing you will ever do. It will make you feel wonderful! It will completely change your life. Your ETERNAL life will be in HEAVEN!

God bless you!