

# A New & Living Way

A Collection of Articles

Investigating New Covenant Worship in Spirit & Truth



## Jesus, The New and Living Way

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**POSTSCRIPT:** Concerning Gathering

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# 1. In Search of Ecclesia

*"The general assembly<sup>1</sup> and church of the Firstborn who are enrolled in heaven"* Hebrews 12:23<sup>2</sup>

## Structure

I would like to use this opening article not to introduce my subject matter per se, but rather to attempt to communicate what has motivated me to write these essays.

At this writing, it has been more than 40 years ago that I received the Spirit of Christ and became a member of the Body of Christ. For the past number of years, I have found myself living the Christian life in a very "unstructured" way with regards to collective gatherings. By this I mean that I am not actively involved in a humanly structured expression of the Body of Christ in my locality. PLEASE NOTE: I BELIEVE WE SHOULD GATHER. The final article in this series is entitled: *Concerning Gathering*. So, please bear with me in the 7 preceding articles, which are an investigation into the essential differences between Old Covenant worship "*according to the letter*" and New Covenant worship "*according to the Spirit*".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Some translations link the "general assembly" with the "angels" in v. 22. I prefer this rendering based on Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words: "*paneguris*, Strong's # 3831, is coupled with the word 'church' (*ekklesia*, Strong's # 1577), as applied to all believers who form the body of Christ." Both Greek words refer to gatherings of citizens for the purpose of discussing and celebrating the affairs of the state.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Scripture are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB)

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:6

At the outset, I would like to try to briefly, but as clearly as possible, communicate the distinction I am making between "structured" and "unstructured" expressions of the Body of Christ: By "structured", I mean humanly organized. This is not to say that what the Spirit of God organizes is literally "unstructured". Everything created by God has structure – beautiful structure. That is the quintessential point: What is humanly structured is quite limited. What is structured by God is rich and beautiful and will not be according to human thoughts and ways, for His thoughts and ways – including the functioning and expression of the Body of Christ – are “higher”.<sup>4</sup> The Holy Spirit had Isaiah use the distance between earth and the heavens to express the difference between what we think and do and the working of God, who is Spirit.

I must add two things here: Firstly, that which God structures cannot be discerned by humans apart from the revelation of the Spirit of God.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, while what God has created is clearly recorded in His word – pertinent to our subject matter here, the Body of Christ – it is never-the-less a mystery - that is, something which needs to be revealed. Without revelation, we understand what we read in the scriptures according to our human experience. This is all we have to work with without revelation from the Spirit of God. Specifically, the structure of the Body of Christ we think we

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<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 55:8-9

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:11

see recorded in the New Testament is more rich and beautiful than what we can see and understand without revelation from the Spirit of God. God's thoughts and ways are beyond ours – higher than ours<sup>6</sup> – therefore what He creates has a structure which is beyond human conception, beyond human perception, beyond human imagination, beyond human comprehension – without revelation from the Spirit of God.<sup>7</sup> This applies to what is written in the New Testament about the Body of Christ. It is a mistake to assume one can understand the written word of God without the understanding given by the Spirit of God. Science can "read" the human body even down to the nuclear level, yet there is still much about the human body science doesn't understand. We can easily read the Spirit-inspired words of the New Testament, yet we cannot possibly understand the structure and working of the Body of Christ without the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

**So, suffice to say, by "structured", I mean humanly organized. PLEASE NOTE – Nothing is unstructured. So, when I use the term "unstructured" in these articles, I mean not humanly organized, but Spirit-structured. By "humanly structured" I mean a given group of local Christians who meet regularly at given times in given places. I am not involved with such a group. By "unstructured" (Spirit-structured) I mean the Body of Christ which exists in my locality but is not identified with a given name and not meeting regularly at given times in given places. I am involved with such,**

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<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 55:8-9

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:9



as led by the Spirit of God. I am, in fact, also actively involved with the Body of Christ regionally, nationally, and internationally – but **as led by the Spirit** (rather than in a humanly structured way). I've chosen my words carefully to try to accurately describe the expression of my Christian life at this time. More explanation is needed, but I think the reader understands and knows others just like me – it is a growing number.

The motivation behind this writing is not to "defend" such a lifestyle – I believe others have done a good job of that.<sup>8</sup> My motivation is rather to "explain" to myself (and others) the why, the what, and the how of such a lifestyle, as well as, to better understand what God desires for me in His decision to lead me (and others) in this way. My desire is to continue in this leading of the Spirit of God which has given me more understanding of certain passages of scripture as well as taken me into some rigorous research of biblical and church history.

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<sup>8</sup> For example, in these articles, I will be referring to the writing of Stan Firth in his "Custom and Command".

*“Blessed is the man whose heart is set on pilgrimage.”* Psalm 84:5b

## Journey

I think a little personal history of my spiritual journey may also be beneficial in explaining my motivation for writing these articles. I think many who have been involved in church ministry may find their story to be similar to mine. For more than 40 years, I've served the Lord in various ways – as a worship leader, a pastor, a missionary, an equipping teacher, an office administrator, a custodian, a writer, et al. I've done so in both denominational and non-denominational groups, in the USA and abroad, in “structured” and in “unstructured” settings.

From the beginning of my spiritual journey, one of the dominant theological influences on my perspective of ministry and mission has been the concept of “restoration” – that is, “*period(s) of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time*”,<sup>9</sup> as well as, a restoration of the faith and practice of the Early Church.<sup>10</sup> Today, I continue to look for a restoration of “apostolicity”. But, whereas I looked for the restoration of apostolic faith and practice, today I look for apostolic faith – “*the apostles’ teaching*”<sup>11</sup>, but not necessarily all of what was apostolic practice. **One of the points I am hoping to make in these articles is this:**

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<sup>9</sup> Acts 3:21

<sup>10</sup> Viz. The Church recorded in the New Testament – the Church of the first century – the Apostolic period.

<sup>11</sup> Acts 2:42

Most of us have this picture of Church history ... We assume the first century Church worshipped in spirit and truth, but then at the end of the first century, Christians began to fall back into various man-made customs, traditions, and organization under the influence of various church fathers and Constantine. And then these man-made customs, traditions and organization continued to increase throughout all Church history – right up to contemporary times. That is the picture painted by almost all presentations of church history, including the ones used in support of the Restoration movements, House Church movements, Organic Church movements. That this is true of the second century and third centuries and beyond is without dispute. What I am questioning is the validity of the assumption that the FIRST CENTURY Church worshiped in spirit and truth.

While I agree that there was a severe spiritual decline *after* the apostolic period, I however do not believe that the apostolic Church had reached perfection within first century. Can we really say that they had perfected worship in spirit and truth?

In these articles, I am suggesting that under the influence of "*the elementary principles of the world*", the first century Church, generally speaking, never moved beyond their Jewish Roots; and that, along with the Gentile churches, continued in these "*elementary principles of the world*". Consequently, the man-made customs, traditions and organization

simply continued on into the second and third centuries and beyond.

Whereas, in the New Testament times, the "elementary principles of the world" manifested as "Jewish Roots" – specifically continuing in the shadow of the law AFTER CHRIST MADE THE LAW OBSOLETE (Hebrews 8:13); these same "elementary principles of the world" can also be identified now in other terms – such as "ritualism", "religious idolatry", "human-organization", "the Babylonian church system", and "the world system".<sup>12</sup>

With regards to structural settings, I have served in both "*old wineskins*" and "*new wine skins*", so to speak.<sup>13</sup> For many years, I tried laboring in the "*old wine skins*" with hopes of "reformation". I came to realize a few things about "*old wineskin*" groups:

- You cannot turn an old wineskin into a new wineskin. And while all things are possible with God, He never intended to and never will turn an old wineskin into a new wineskin.<sup>14</sup> His thoughts and ways are different from ours.<sup>15</sup>
- The Lord loves and meets with those who are His who happen to be sitting in those old wineskins for the whatever their reasons. And I

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<sup>12</sup> We will also be discussing a less familiar term coined by Jacques Ellul – "Technique" – which very much characterizes the contemporary church.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Matthew 9:16-17; Mark 2:21-22; Luke 5:37-39. Cf. "Radical Renewal: The Problem of Wineskins Today", Howard A. Snyder.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hebrews 8:13. Indeed, the whole of the Book of Hebrews demonstrates this principle in God's providence.

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 55:8

learned that, if I was going to truly serve the Lord, I would have to be willing to do the same<sup>16</sup> – that is, love those whom He loves.

- I learned that those old wineskins can be, to some degree, containers of "*the beauty of the Lord*"<sup>17</sup> – that is, works God has wrought in history. Even today, I can attend a "worship service"<sup>18</sup> in a "conventional" church and be blessed with God's word and Spirit.
- People remain in old wineskin churches because they are satisfied there. What is indicated in Jesus' parable – that the old wine is "better"<sup>19</sup> - is true, in the sense that, if you are "wanting your needs met", you will probably be more socially and emotionally satisfied in an old wineskin church. "Meeting people's needs" is not necessarily a goal of a new wineskin group, but it is the expressed goal of most old wineskin groups.

Some things I've learned about "new wineskin" groups:

- An underlying issue of why people leave an old wineskin group in search of a "new wineskin" group may be the desire for continual spiritual growth and maturity. To say, "I out-grew that", I think would be a fairly accurate way of communicating why I desired to go beyond the old wineskins.

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

<sup>17</sup> Psalm 27:4

<sup>18</sup> I have intentionally placed this questionable term in quotation marks, since defining worship – "in Spirit and truth" – is the goal of these articles.

<sup>19</sup> Luke 5:39

- I think another underlying issue is "calling": Old wine may "taste better", but somebody has to be working on some new wine, or we will eventually "run out of wine", so to speak. More accurately, God must continue moving forward in His purpose. Some people are "pioneers" – who like to get in on the "ground floor" of the work. They may even have the apostolic and prophetic calling to lay foundations for the next expression of the kingdom in their generation<sup>20</sup>.

Thus, for many years, I then tried laboring in the various types of "new wineskins" with the hopes of participating in the "Restoration". Suffice to say, after many years of repeatedly experiencing blessing turning to dissipation, today, I would refer to so-called "new wineskin" groups as also being merely "conventional".<sup>21</sup> I am now using the term "conventional" to mean specifically groups which have a "collective identity" (if not a group name) and meet regularly at given times and places. And, in this category, I am also including groups which would identify themselves as "house churches" - if, in fact, they meet regularly at given times and places.

Even after emigrating from "conventional" environments – old and new - I have never been able to fully identify with most of the "house church movements"<sup>22</sup>. The reasons are:

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Ephesians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 3:10-11; 12:28.

<sup>21</sup> Many seem to prefer the term "institutional" churches.

<sup>22</sup> In using the term "house church movement" I am including many groups that identify themselves as "organic" or "simple" churches.

- I often do not share in their reasons for leaving the "conventional" churches. I perceive their reasons to be often more social than spiritual.
- I often do not agree with aspects of their faith and practice as "house churches". While belonging to a "denomination" is no insurance against unsound doctrine, neither is belonging to a house church. As the apostles warned, it is plain to see that unsound doctrine always has been and is on the rise.<sup>23</sup>
- Most often, house church meetings are merely smaller reproductions of "conventional" "worship services". The Body of Christ lives and grows from the life-flow of the Spirit of Christ. So, while the meetings of many of these groups may provide opportunity for so-called "body ministry", the mere opportunity for everyone to "have their say" usually doesn't result in the life-flow of the Spirit of Christ to "perfect" the saints<sup>24</sup>. Most so-called "organic" groups allege that by simply gathering in the name of Jesus - without leaders - in the church meeting, allowing each person the freedom to share, will result in the life-flow of the Spirit of Christ. This is a faulty and unfortunate assumption. I am inclined to think that those who say and write such things either have no actual experience in authentic body ministry or cannot actually discern the Spirit of Christ.

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<sup>23</sup> Acts 20:29; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; 2 Peter 3:3; Jude 1:18.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Ephesians 4:11-16

- I cannot identify with house church movements that intentionally ignore scripture and do not recognize the leadership ministries and also the "ascension gift" ministries Jesus desires to serve His Body.<sup>25</sup>
- While I fully understand and identify with their desire for deeper fellowship with Christ, more authentic fellowship with another, and for the freedom to function more fully as the Body of Christ through the exercise of their spiritual gifts as a "priesthood of all believers", etc., in my assessment, the commission to make disciples of Christ is still not being accomplished in most house church settings.
- I don't perceive their "new" or "re-imaged" practice of church life to be producing anything essentially different from the "conventional" groups. What I mean specifically is this: Even though they may use the terms like "organic" and "life of Christ", I don't perceive the realities of such being produced in their midst.<sup>26</sup>

Do I perceive those realities in my personal spiritual life? Yes. Do I perceive those realities in relationship with other people? Yes – but with relatively few other people. But, this question remains: If, in fact, "conventional" groups are failing to meet the Lord's desires as revealed in His word and by His Spirit; and if, in fact, house churches are also failing to meet the Lord's desires as revealed in His word and by His Spirit, is what am I doing – what am I participating in – all of which the Lord desires? Is my "unstructured"

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<sup>25</sup> Ephesians 4:10-12; Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:28

<sup>26</sup> I am not alone in these perspectives: See Wayne Jacobson's article "House Church isn't the Answer", and Frank Viola's article, " Why I'm Not Involved in 'Organic Church' (For Now) & Why You Can't Find One".



Christian lifestyle meeting the Lord's desires as revealed in His word and by his Spirit? Am I participating in the purpose of God moving forward? These things haunt me. I cannot ignore them. The need to answer these questions is the motivation behind these articles.

Also: Regarding the spiritual realities I experience in my personal life and in relationship with "relatively few other people: Jesus said HE would take care of the building of His Church.<sup>27</sup> And I must endeavor to know and understand how to do what He commissioned me to do – namely, make disciples of Christ.<sup>28</sup> These articles are exercises in knowing and understanding this commission in light of the New Covenant.

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<sup>27</sup> Matthew 16:18

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 28:19-20

# Perception

At this time, the Church Jesus is building seems to be – I'll use the word "elusive". I've personally been waiting to see certain things for more than 40 years. We are hoping to see an increasing number of local fellowships looking like what we think we see in the New Testament. I use the phrase, "what we think we see", because, without revelatory understanding from the Spirit of God, our understanding of scripture - that is, the images we envision when we read the words – what we are expecting to see – is based on our previous experience. It must be, for we have nothing else to base it on. Unless we receive revelatory understanding from the Spirit of God, we are expecting to see something like what we have already seen. But God is doing that which is *"exceeding abundant above and beyond what we can think or imagine"*.<sup>29</sup> What God is doing, *"eye has not seen, ear has not heard, and hasn't entered into the imagination what God has prepared"*.<sup>30</sup> Wanting to see that "elusive" New Testament church here in the physical realm, our expectations have been continually disappointed.

What we must understand is that *"God is Spirit and we must worship Him in spirit"*<sup>31</sup>. The "true circumcision" *"has no confidence in the flesh, but worships God in the spirit"*.<sup>32</sup> The church that Jesus is building is IN THE SPIRIT. We must have revelatory understanding from the Spirit of God to see it and be

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<sup>29</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:20

<sup>30</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:9

<sup>31</sup> John 4:24

<sup>32</sup> Philippians 3:3

it. It is just like the kingdom: You must be *"born of the Spirit"* to see it and enter into it.<sup>33</sup> The Lord commissioned the Church to *"proclaim the gospel of the kingdom throughout the whole world as a witness to all the nations"*.<sup>34</sup> How can we do that if we haven't sufficiently seen or sufficiently entered into that spiritual dimension ourselves?

The scripture speaks of this same phenomenon when it says: *"now we do not yet see all things subjected to (Man)", BUT WE SEE JESUS"*.<sup>35</sup> So too, the Body of Christ seems "elusive", BUT WE CAN "SEE" JESUS. How do we see Jesus? Where is He? IN THE SPIRIT. I purport that it is the same with the Body of Christ. The Body must be spiritually discerned. And one cannot spiritually *"discern the Body,"*<sup>36</sup> until one spiritually discerns the Head – that is, has revelation of the mystery of Christ. *"For even as the Body is one, and yet has many members, ... SO ALSO IS CHRIST."*<sup>37</sup> The Body is like Christ. Spiritual revelation of the mystery of Christ is absolutely indispensable for being the Church.<sup>38</sup> In fact, the Church is essentially and primarily IN THE SPIRIT, yet being manifest through the lives of each of the members of Christ's Body. This too is something that will be investigated in these articles. So, as we move through these articles, let us together pursue revelation of Jesus and relationship with Jesus. The reflection of Jesus will

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<sup>33</sup> John 3:3-6

<sup>34</sup> Matthew 24:14

<sup>35</sup> Hebrews 2:8-9

<sup>36</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:29

<sup>37</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12

<sup>38</sup> I have written at length about these things in other articles – e.g., *Christ Is Pre-Requisite for Church*. For a complimentary .pdf copy, Email: [AtChristTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristTable@gmail.com)

become visible as the Lord desires. Let us leave the manifestation of His Body to Him who said He would build His Church.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> I hope I have succeeded in avoiding being "labeled" – be it "house church", or "simple church", or "organic church", et. al. And I certainly would not want to be labeled "elusive church"! Like everyone else, I too look for a "label" just for the sake of communication of ideas. But we live in the unfortunate time when the postmodernism and deconstructionism of secularists have made words – terms and labels – close to meaningless. But worse, Christians glibly putting labels as want-to-be proponents of certain concepts have made most labels detestable. For example, even though I am, I can no longer call myself an "evangelical". Likewise, while "organic church", intrinsically, is a wonderful term, I cannot wear it as a label. As Shakespeare said: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

## 2. In Search of New Covenant Worship

These articles are about "worship" – namely, an inquiry into the meaning of the Lord's phrase: "*worship in spirit and in truth*".<sup>40</sup> I intend to share on other topics also; but I give "worship" the pre-eminence because, as I understand it, the other topics are "elements" of "worship". I will define what I understand to be "worship" in light of the New Covenant, as I've come to believe THAT is the key to understanding what Jesus meant by "*worship in spirit and truth*". This will necessitate somewhat defining the term "New Covenant". There is much fine writing on the New Covenant detailing the work of Christ which established the covenant and the promises He has secured for us who believe. But what I will attempt to focus on here is that which I understand to be the heart and essence of the New Covenant – "*the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*"<sup>41</sup>.

I will also attempt to look at those "elements of worship" in light of this. Those "elements" have to do with the nature of the Church<sup>42</sup>, the life of the Church<sup>43</sup>, and the commission of the Church<sup>44</sup>, for the Church is those "*worshippers whom the Father is seeking*".<sup>45</sup> Along with pursuing a more clear

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<sup>40</sup> John 4:23-24

<sup>41</sup> Romans 8:2; Cf. John 6:63; 2 Corinthians 3:6

<sup>42</sup> I will be discussing what many today refer to as an "organic" approach to being the Church.

<sup>43</sup> I will be discussing the "unstructured" approach to church life being entered into by many today.

<sup>44</sup> I will be discussing "being" the Church and "doing" church, specifically in terms of our commission to be disciples of the King and make disciples of the Kingdom.

<sup>45</sup> John 4:23-24

understanding of New Covenant worship, my goals also include gaining more understanding of some of the things which Jesus meant to be innate<sup>46</sup> to the Church – that is, innate to the people who live in the New Covenant.<sup>47</sup>

These articles are not meant to be merely a critique of the visible church, but more a seeking of that which the Father is seeking – "true worship" from those who "*worship in spirit and truth*".<sup>48</sup> However, I must say that I have come to this conclusion: The worship of most of the visible Church<sup>49</sup> is still under the shadow of the Old Covenant<sup>50</sup>. Missing the reality of the One who has opened for us "A New and Living Way",<sup>51</sup> the visible church is falling short of "*the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*"<sup>52</sup>, and consequently, is also ineffective in its mission in the world<sup>53</sup>.

In response to this situation, many voices have arisen speaking of "a new way" of seeing and doing things. I believe this is good. But, amid the many voices is much confusion. I believe much of what is being said and done is still missing the heart and essence of the New Covenant. It is not so much that the Church needs to "re-image" itself or find "new" ways of doing things.

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<sup>46</sup> In-born

<sup>47</sup> "Born from above", "Born of the Spirit" (John 3:3-6; 2 Corinthians 3:6)

<sup>48</sup> John 4:23-24

<sup>49</sup> I believe the perfection of the Church exists now in the spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:27 and Hebrews 12:22-24) It is God's purpose and our calling to manifest that perfection in the visible Church. The visible Church contains "wheat and tares" - many imperfections. What now exists in the spirit will not be fully manifest until the coming age.

<sup>50</sup> What the apostle Paul and the writer to the Hebrews refer to as "dead works".

<sup>51</sup> Hebrews 10:20

<sup>52</sup> Philippians 3:14

<sup>53</sup> Matthew 24:14

I believe it simply - and authentically - needs to take hold of the New Covenant.

I have often heard: "God is doing a new thing". But my concern is that we are like the Athenians, always looking for some "new thing".<sup>54</sup> According to Scripture, the New Covenant IS that "new thing".<sup>55</sup> What we need to "*worship in spirit and truth*", what we need to be the Church Jesus is building, what we need to participate in the purpose of God is to find and enter into that "New and Living Way" which Jesus has ALREADY opened for us when He inaugurated the New Covenant.<sup>56</sup>

I believe the phrase "*worship in spirit and truth*" in John 4:24 can be equated with the phrase "new and living way" in Hebrews 10:20. And the key to knowing, understanding, and living out this reality is the New Covenant. When we see the New Covenant, and when the New Covenant is seen in our midst, we'll manifest "*the Church, which is His Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all*".<sup>57</sup> Again, I understand the essence of the New Covenant to be "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus"<sup>58</sup> – a phrase we will be investigating in these articles.

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<sup>54</sup> Acts 17:21

<sup>55</sup> Isaiah 43:19; Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:36; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; 5:17; Hebrews 8:10, 13; 9:15; 10:16, 20; 12:24.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Hebrews 10:5-9, 15-20.

<sup>57</sup> Ephesians 1:23

<sup>58</sup> Romans 8:2; Cf. John 6:63; 2 Corinthians 3:6

There are many issues to study and deliberate regarding the New Covenant which I won't even try to address in these articles.<sup>59</sup> What I WILL attempt to share, though, are some implications of the New Covenant as it relates to worship and elements of worship lived out in the life, ministry, and mission of the Church, as worship is the context in which the New Covenant is played out.

Actually, I have written elsewhere on "*worship in spirit and truth*". These are earlier articles written along the way on my journey to where I am now in my understanding of "*worship in spirit and truth*".<sup>60</sup> In this present collection of articles, I desire to address specifically worship lived out in the life, ministry, and mission of the Church. The Church of the New Covenant is an organism in the Spirit, which is given both life and growth by the very life of the Spirit of Christ, the Head of the Body. There is much written about "the life of Christ" as the basis of "organic church"<sup>61</sup> which I would recommend as background to what I have to share here.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Recommended reading: "Five Views on Law and Gospel" (Counterpoints Series edited by Stanley N. Gundy).

<sup>60</sup> Complimentary copies in .pdf format of *The Woman & The Well* and *Tabernacle Truths* are available by Emailing: [AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com)

<sup>61</sup> While I think the term "organic church" has been indiscriminately used and already over-used, it is still the best term I can use to identify what I have to share.

<sup>62</sup> Concepts like "the life of Christ" and "organic" spiritual life and growth in the Body of Christ, etc. are NOT new to our generation. But the Holy Spirit is leading people into such truth again in this generation; and for that I am grateful. However, I believe that much of what is being spoken and written today is drawn from, yet not of the same quality as, that of writers a few generations ago. Therefore, generally speaking, I recommend the older writers like Jesse-Penn Lewis, T. Austin-Sparks, Watchman Nee, Stephen Kaung, and Devern Fromke. However, having recommended these authors, I must say that with regards to the concepts of "Christ in me" and "No longer I, but Christ", I definitely prefer an alternative perspective offered by the writing of J. Sidlow Baxter, specifically his collection "A New Call to Holiness", "His Deeper Work in Us", and "Our High Calling"



For some foundational reading regarding things I will be sharing about "A New and Living Way" for the Church, I would also recommend "*Custom and Command*" by Stan Firth.<sup>63</sup> Firth's book attempts to give a "scriptural" basis, which I don't think is being sufficiently offered in many of the popular writings today on these things. (I would hope that we would not waste time with things not founded in scripture.) In "*Custom and Command*", Firth attempts to give a needed scriptural "defense" for the "unstructured" approach to "organic church". It is, thus far, the best offering I have come across to serve as a scripture-based presentation for the practice of "organic church". In this, Firth has done us a good service.

Because of its widespread influence and popularity, I feel I must mention the book, "Pagan Christianity" by George Barna and Frank Viola. I do not disagree with the contents of their book. But what I am offering in these articles is significantly different in this way: "Pagan Christianity" addresses the various human traditions which gained the ascendancy AFTER the apostolic period of the Church. The negative aspects of the practices of the Church which I am discussing in these articles are rather "*the elementary*

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compiled under the title, "Christian Holiness Revisited and Restated", which majors on "transformation" rather than the supposed crucifixion of "self".

<sup>63</sup> Stan Firth has written a second book on this subject – "The Remarkable Replacement Army", which draws from the actual history of the Norwegian Resistance Movement in World War 2. This book paints a picture of what an "organic" group may look like. And on-going posts on his website, [www.RemarkableReplacementArmy.com](http://www.RemarkableReplacementArmy.com), give some counsel on avoiding conventional church patterns by being led of the Spirit through "socializing" as a "family". Complimentary downloads of both books are available in .pdf format from his website: [www.RemarkableReplacementArmy.com](http://www.RemarkableReplacementArmy.com) and the books in paperback format are for sale on [www.Lulu.com](http://www.Lulu.com)

*principles of the world*" which were present DURING the apostolic period of the Church. I believe these "*elementary principles of the world*" are the roots of the human traditions throughout all of Church history. There is an explanation as to WHY human tradition gained the ascendancy AFTER the apostolic period and continued to plague the Church throughout history. Is it possible the apostolic Church itself did not sufficiently realize Christ's freedom from "*the elementary principles of the world*" and continued to worship under the shadow of the Old Covenant, thus causing the bondage to increase into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century and beyond? I believe so. I realize this is a novel and controversial proposition. But whether the Early Church walked in the New Covenant and then fell away having its realities eclipsed by human traditions, or whether the Church has YET to worship in the full authenticity of the New Covenant, what I propose in these articles is that the need for "worship in spirit and truth", and "A New & Living Way" is YET to be entered into by the visible church. Regarding "*the elementary principles of the world*", which I will be discussing in more detail, I would also recommend a number of essays by other authors.<sup>64</sup>

In these articles, I hope to present a biblical theology,<sup>65</sup> yet at the same time, a prophetic visionary presentation of "organic church" and "kingdom community" to inspire what I believe Jesus desires for His New Covenant

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<sup>64</sup> "Paul's Usage of *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* (The Elementary Principles of the World)", by Gary DeLashmutt; "Technique or Kindly Light", by Vernard Eller; the vast body of writings by Jacques Ellul – specifically what he writes on "Technique". (There is an excellent article on Jacques Ellul: "Synopsis & Analysis of Jacques Ellul", by Jim Fowler.)

<sup>65</sup> For a definition of "Biblical Theology": <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/biblical-theology/>

people to live in – for the Father's eternal purpose in His Son<sup>66</sup>, and "to the praise of His glory".<sup>67</sup>

So, what else do I have to offer about "New Covenant Worship"? Let us first take hold of a core definition of "worship". This is the purpose of the next article, Another Look at Worship. And then after a few more articles,<sup>68</sup> in which we will sort through some of the shadows of the Old Covenant, we will be more able to see clearly from a New Covenant perspective the life, ministry, and mission of the Church.

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<sup>66</sup> Ephesians 1:4-5; 2:10; 3:9-11.

<sup>67</sup> Ephesians 1:12

<sup>68</sup> 4. Old Covenant Undertow in the Early Church

5. Led by the Spirit

6. Elementary Principles of the World

6.1. Sacralization of the Spiritual

6.2. Sacralization of the Secular

6.3. Conventional Worship Praxes

7. "I Have Given You as a Covenant"

8. Concerning Gathering

### 3. Another Look at Worship

#### Defining Worship

Two of my favorite quotes defining Worship: ...

“Worship is the submission of all of our nature to God. It is the quickening of the conscience by his holiness; the nourishment of mind with his truth; the purifying of imagination by his beauty; the opening of the heart to his love; the surrender of will to his purpose—all this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable.” (William Temple)

"True worship pulls together the conscience, heart, mind, imagination, and will. When these coalesce in unified expression, life finds its meaning.... Worship binds the diversities of our nature and gives it a unity of expression. Life is no longer fragmented. Life is unified." (Ravi Zacharias)

These two quotes beautifully communicate that "worship" encompasses the whole of life. Worship is not a special, separate activity in the life of a Christian – it is the lifestyle of a Christian. Worship is not something relegated to "worship services" – it is a "way of life" – “A New and Living Way”, which is *"in spirit and truth"*.

Our English word, "worship", means to attribute worth to an object. To worship God is to ascribe to Him supreme worth, for He alone is worthy.<sup>69</sup> Colossians 1:18 identifies Jesus as "*the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.*" The verse goes on to tell us that, because He is the Head and the Beginning and the First, "*He has the preeminence in all things*". True worship – in spirit and truth – is authentically giving Christ first place in everything – in all aspects of our life.

An overview of the biblical words associated with "worship" point to two related concepts: "surrender" and "service". The first mention of the word "worship" in the Hebrew Bible is in reference to what Abraham said he and Isaac were about to do as an act of sacrifice.<sup>70</sup> It is the Hebrew word *shachah*<sup>71</sup>, meaning to bow down in homage.<sup>72</sup> The Hebrew word, *abad*, is found more often. It means the work or service of a bond servant. (One can see why Paul liked the title "bondservant" for himself,<sup>73</sup> as did James, Peter, and Jude.<sup>74</sup>) There are also two Greek words found in the New Testament translated as "worship": *proskuneo* meaning to bow down homage;<sup>75</sup> and,

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. Psalm 29:1-2; 96:7-9

<sup>70</sup> Genesis 22:5

<sup>71</sup> Strong's # 7812

<sup>72</sup> There are earlier mentions of "calling on the Lord" (*qara*, Strong's # 7121) sometimes translated "worship" (Genesis 4:26; 12:8), which is certainly a component of worship (prayer), but not the essence of the meaning of worship.

<sup>73</sup> Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1; also 2 Corinthians 4:5; Galatians 1:10.

<sup>74</sup> James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1.

<sup>75</sup> Strong's # 4352

*latreia* , meaning work or service.<sup>76</sup> I would give this as a working definition of worship: Worship is a lifestyle of surrender and service to God.

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<sup>76</sup> Strong's # 2999

# Elements of Worship

As I've said, the significant thing to understand about worship is that it is a lifestyle. It goes beyond the conventional activities taking place in "worship services" – it has to do with how we live the whole our lives before God.

Having said that, in these articles, I am also addressing the implications of New Covenant worship on particular activities – namely, teaching, fellowship, prayer, and breaking of bread.<sup>77</sup> These activities are what I am referring to as "elements of worship". The fundamental element of worship is LIVING A LIFE, led by the Spirit, in surrender and service "to the praise of His glory"<sup>78</sup>. This is the very purpose of the New Covenant. From this foundation of a surrendered lifestyle the other "elements" of teaching, fellowship, prayer, and breaking of bread are served for the "*perfecting (completing, maturing) of the saints*".<sup>79</sup> I like to refer to these other "elements" of teaching, fellowship, prayer, and breaking of bread as "Bodily Functions".

Worship is, by nature, God-centered. But these "Bodily Functions" are, by nature, people-centered. However, **if they arise as part of our everyday lifestyle, led by the Spirit, they too are acts of worship.** They are truly "elements of worship" **ONLY IF they are led by the Spirit and incorporated**

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<sup>77</sup> Acts 2:42

<sup>78</sup> Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14

<sup>79</sup> Ephesians 4:11-16. "perfecting" (Greek: *katartismos*, Strong's # 2677)

into our everyday lifestyle. Why am I saying this? The moment we "sacralize"<sup>80</sup> these activities by setting them apart in specially scheduled times and places they become "Technique"<sup>81</sup> – "*elemental principles of the world*" (even idols) and cease to be true elements of New Covenant worship in spirit and truth. This is the major theme which runs through these articles.

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<sup>80</sup> "Sacralization" is something I will be referring to often in other articles. The word refers to the donning of activities to be "sacred" – that is, "set apart" from that which is common.

<sup>81</sup> A term coined by Jacques Ellul which we will discuss in another article.



# Custom or Command

We need to ask ourselves this question: Is the practice of these activities, as done in conventional "worship services", actually worship? Do they truly represent a biblical perspective on worship?<sup>82</sup> In his book, Stan Firth frames the question this way: Is doing these activities at "worship services" a custom or a command?

But there are other questions to be asked as well: Is that really a command in the New Covenant? Or is that a custom carried over from the Old Covenant? Are "worship services" in and of themselves a shadow of Old Covenant worship? Is New Covenant worship something relegated to "church meetings"? Is New Covenant worship – worship in spirit and truth – structured in a ministry schedule? Or unstructured in a life flow as led by the Spirit?

A major point in Firth's booklet is that more and more people have found that an "unstructured" approach has given them more time and more freedom to be led by the Spirit in their ministry to other people. I think this is

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<sup>82</sup> I will not discuss "how the world has crept into the Church", except to point out: If these conventional activities are not something generated by the Spirit, this could explain why ministry leaders have felt it necessary to introduce entertainment into their church services - in order to make it seem like time well-spent. But this could also explain why more and more people have quit attending these church services altogether: They can find entertainment in many other places; and are not necessarily looking for or expecting to find entertainment when they "go to church".

quite true; but, having more time and freedom to minister to one another<sup>83</sup> is not necessarily the heart and essence of the New Covenant. I believe that is just one result but not the core of the purposes of God. He has made a New Covenant in Christ – a "New and Living Way" for "worship in spirit and truth" for the following purposes: for **Revelation of Christ**, for **Relationship with Christ**, with a view to the **Reflection of Christ**. Whereas conventional groups are intentionally people-centered, authentic New Covenant Christianity is intentionally Christ-centered.

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<sup>83</sup> This is a major aspect of Firth's overall perspective. In fact, doing the "one anothers" is a major emphasis of most so-called "organic" house churches. <http://www.remarkablereplacementarmy.com/the-shape-of-the-church/>

# Sacralized Shadows

Whereas conventional (Old Covenant) religion makes a separation between these sacralized activities and every-day life, New Covenant Christianity make no such separation.

But the core of the problem lies deeper: are the focus of Old Covenant religion. Whereas, relating to the Person of Christ "24/7", as it were, is the focus of New Covenant Christianity. In fact, the apostle Paul referred to these special, sacral, separated, structured activities as Old Covenant *"things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."*<sup>84</sup> The difference between "shadow" and "substance" is the difference between religious activities and relationship with the Person of Christ.

Am I saying that we should not have teaching, fellowship, prayer and breaking of bread? No, I am not saying that. Firth makes the point that while many people still prefer the custom of doing these things in a structured way (humanly organized), there are a growing number of people who have started doing these things in an unstructured way (Holy Spirit-organized), and, as he attempts to point out in the scriptures, they are not violating any divine commands. And with this I agree.

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<sup>84</sup> Colossians 2:17

# New Covenant Discipleship

Jesus commissioned us to “make disciples” of Himself. I’ll agree that discipling incorporates teaching, fellowship, prayer and breaking of bread, although I believe we need to “take another look” at those activities.<sup>85</sup> But as Stan Firth asks: Is doing these activities at "worship services" a custom or a command? We can also ask further: Do these activities need to take place in special, sacral, separated, structured “church meetings”?

I have concluded that there is also a spiritual growth factor to consider. Structure and discipline are thought to be a necessity in early childhood. I whole-heartedly agree that "new" Christians need nurturing and cultivating. They need to be spiritually fed – or better, they need to be trained to feed themselves in the Word and Spirit of Christ. They need spiritual parents, or mentors to disciple them. Discipleship is necessary (and commissioned). **But** - particularly if these "new" Christians are not "young" in age - I don't believe that discipleship must take place in special activities, in separated times and places. Again, this approach simply promotes becoming skilled in these activities and not the **pursuit of relationship of knowing and understanding the Person of Christ**. That is NOT New Covenant discipleship.

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<sup>85</sup> Suggested reading: My articles *Discipleship & The Equipping Ministries*, *Apostolic Teaching*, *The Fellowship of the Spirit*, *From Children to a Mature Man*, *The Foundation of the Apostles & Prophets*, *Laying the Foundation*, *Hearing What the Spirit Says to the Church*, *Seeking the Lord*, *Breaking of Bread*, all of which are freely available in .PDF format by emailing: [AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com)

Also: Those Christians who have experienced healthy spiritual growth, often feel they are being constantly distracted from their relationship with Christ, as well as, hindered in their being taught and led by the Spirit, if they must submit to the programmatic schedule of humanly organized church structures.

Now it may be countered that many Christians, in fact, do not feel this way, and are rather satisfied with the programs of humanly organized church structures. I would agree that this is probably true – sad, but true. But groups cannot offer what they do not have. Consequently, many people have not been given the opportunity to experience more spiritual reality – and they simply do not know that there is more. This is the insidious thing of the whole affair: God's purpose is dwarfed, and people miss the reality of Christ in the New Covenant, because, by its practice, the visible Church<sup>86</sup> communicates that this shadow of the Old Covenant is authentic Christianity. This is grievous.

I don't believe I am being glib in saying that in a very real sense I and many others have "out-grown" the structured approach to church life and ministry. I feel at liberty to say that because, the writer to the Hebrews said that these special, sacral, separated, structured activities have, indeed, been made

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<sup>86</sup> I believe the perfection of the Church exists now in the spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:27) It is God's purpose and our calling to manifest that perfection in the visible Church. The visible Church contains "wheat and tares" - many imperfections. What now exists in the spirit will not be fully manifest until the coming age.

"obsolete" by the New Covenant.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, I think it is quite reasonable that I, and many others, have found these special, sacral, separated, structured activities to be "obsolete" in the Christian life.

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<sup>87</sup> Hebrews 8:13

# Shadow, Technique, & Idolatry

In fact, I am pushing the issue further by saying that the practice of these activities, separated into special times and places in a humanly structured way, is actually hindering the visible church from the reality of the New Covenant. They have "come to Christ" in their personal lives, but in their shared lives, continuing in what has "*faded away*", "*a veil still remains*".<sup>88</sup> The "veil" is this "body" of special, separated, structured – sacral activities they do together.<sup>89</sup> Consequently, the focus remains on these "special" activities instead of on Christ. That is what I mean by living under the shadow of the Old Covenant - the "shadow" is mistaken for the "Reality". The religious thing (times, places, activities) becomes the focus rather than relationship with Christ. Relating to Christ becomes relegated to only those sacralized, special, separated, structured times, places, and activities (viz. "church meetings"), instead of "practicing the presence" of Christ 24/7, and seeking to surrender every situation in every aspect of daily life in service to the lordship of Christ, in other words, being "led by the Spirit".

The religious "technique" takes the place of God – literally – in that, the skillful practice of religious techniques occupies the pre-eminent place in the spiritual life rather than the Person of Christ occupying the pre-eminent place.

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 3:12-17

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Hebrews 10:20 (NIV)

Idolatry is defined as putting something in the place of God. Thus, authentic worship is replaced with a religiosity that is nothing short of idolatry – "good" works, but dead works. I say "dead works" in the sense that they do not lead to spiritual life if one does not know God in a vital relationship in the Spirit. As Jesus said of the Samaritan woman at the well, many are "worshipping" a God they do not know.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> John 4:22



# A Poor Witness

This type of "christianity"<sup>91</sup> puts forth a poor witness: As we know, our faith is not only communicated by what we say, but also by what we do. In fact, today, what Christians say carries increasingly little positive influence in society. And, as James said, "We SHOW our faith by what we are doing."<sup>92</sup> THAT is the primary witness to society.

One can easily see the truth in the statement made by Marshall McLuhan, "The medium is the message."<sup>93</sup> By this is meant that a communication medium affects society not only by the content delivered over the medium, but also by the characteristics of the medium itself. In other words, this type of religious activities-oriented "Christianity" puts forth the witness that such is the purpose of God in sending the Christ – religious activities. Whereas, the purpose of God is, in fact, eternal life – "knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent".<sup>94</sup>

The apostle Paul encourages us to let "the word of Christ dwell richly" in our midst. But so many only know religious activities and not Christ. Therefore, the medium – their religious activities - is their only message because that is their only "reality" (which is actually only a shadow). So, the

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<sup>91</sup> It is more accurate to refer to it as "Christendom".

<sup>92</sup> James 2:18

<sup>93</sup> Marshall McLuhan, known as a pioneer in media theory, coined the phrase "The medium is the message." in his book, "Understanding Media" (1964).

<sup>94</sup> John 17:3

message of their witness to society is: "Get up early Sunday morning and come to our church meeting. We are going to listen to a sermon, sing a song, receive a sacrament and say a prayer." Is it really very surprising that people are not interested?

# “The Elementary Principles of the World”

Again, I will push the issue even further by saying this: I purport that the spiritual condition which I have been describing is the result of an intentional and adversarial effort by “the rulers, powers and world forces of darkness”<sup>95</sup> to hinder God's purpose for the Church and its witness to the world - that is, to hinder the manifestation of the New Covenant. I have come to see in the scripture that this hindrance – this spiritual veil, if you will, can be identified as “the elementary principles of the world” – the *ta stoicheia tou kosmou* - which the apostle Paul refers to.<sup>96</sup> And these “elementary principles of the world”, are, in fact, tools of “the rulers, powers and world forces of darkness” against which Paul said we are struggling.<sup>97</sup>

We will speak more of these things; but first, I'd like to discuss the biblical context in which we find these “elemental principles of the world”. They are found, not surprisingly, in the “philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men”.<sup>98</sup> But, possibly somewhat surprisingly, they are also found in the Jewish Roots of the Early Church<sup>99</sup>, which is the topic of the next article.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ephesians 6:12

<sup>96</sup> Galatians 4:3, 9 & Colossians 2:8, 20.

<sup>97</sup> Ephesians 6:12

<sup>98</sup> Colossians 2:8-23

<sup>99</sup> Galatians 4:1-11 and 21-26

<sup>100</sup> The astute reader may be thinking: “But the Mosaic Law WAS GIVEN BY GOD.” That is true. But God later made that law “obsolete”, replacing it with a New Covenant. A primary argument in these articles is this: To insist on continuing in that which God has discontinued, is both grievous to the Holy Spirit and inhibiting to the purpose of God and people of God. In these articles, I am attempting to explain how something like the law given by God to Israel can equate with “the elementary principles of the world” – specifically, when after God

# 4. Old Covenant Undertow in the Early Church

## Introduction

Most likely when the reader has been exposed to presentations of the "Jewish Roots in Christianity", along with Old Testament "types and shadows" of Christ, it is often the case that Jewish rituals, customs and traditions associated with Jewish feasts are also presented, and the suggestion is made that Christians may be spiritually enriched through the practice of these as forms of worship.<sup>101</sup> In this article, my goal is diametrically the opposite. So, at the outset, I would like to make the statement that my sole objective in presenting a case for the Jewish influence on worship in the Early Church is, in the end, to support the idea that this influence was, in fact, what the apostle Paul was addressing in his epistle to the Galatians and equating with "*the elementary principles of the world*".<sup>102</sup>

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has rendered that law "obsolete", and people, deceived by spiritual forces, continue to worship under the shadow of the Old Covenant instead of the New Covenant.

<sup>101</sup> e.g., Observing and celebrating the Jewish feasts and partaking of Seder Meal, et. al, as is commonly done in Messianic Christian movements.

<sup>102</sup> Galatians 4:1-11 and 21-26. As we will see, Paul also spoke of "*the elementary principles of the world*" in his epistle to the Colossians. In his letter to the Galatians, he was addressing the first century Judaizers' influence of mixing Jewish customs and practices based on the Law of Moses with Christianity. And in his letter to the Colossians, he was addressing the early influence of Jewish Gnosticism in first century Christianity.

Now, it is my personal conviction that EVERY type and shadow in the Old Testament was inspired by the Spirit of God for one purpose and one purpose only: to reveal the Christ. Not only is the revelation of Jesus Christ the fundamental need of those Jews still waiting for the coming of Messiah, but the revelation of the Christ – beginning with the Old Testament types and shadows - is also **the One Sure Foundation of the Christian Church**.<sup>103</sup> I am totally committed to authentic Christ-centeredness. Therefore, I hold a precious place for the Christ-revealing types and shadows of the Old Testament. I believe referring to these as "Jewish Roots in the Early Church" is literally accurate.

However, the term "Jewish Roots" is most commonly used to refer to those Jewish rituals, customs and traditions based in the Old Testament forms of temple and synagogue worship. So, for our present discussion, that is the usage I am attributing the term "Jewish Roots" – namely, Jewish rituals, customs, and traditions. This is quite different from the other Christ-centered meaning.

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<sup>103</sup> Matthew 16:18; 2 Timothy 2:19; Hebrews 5:12-6:2

# Jewish Roots in the Acts of the Apostles

The case for the existence of "Jewish Roots" in the worship of the Early Church is well documented. Many authors have done a fine job of establishing this as historical fact.<sup>104</sup> More importantly, what we see reported in these writings on Early Church history is confirmed by scripture – mainly from the Book of Acts.

Luke wrote the Book of Acts some 30 years<sup>105</sup> after the Lord ascended. Yet, when Luke referred to the distance between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, he used the phrase, "a Sabbath day's walk" – still using Rabbinical Jewish vernacular. The first disciples and apostles in Jerusalem were still expecting Jesus to establish the kingdom there in Jerusalem.<sup>106</sup> I think these two facts begin to give us some indication of the pervading Jewish mindset of the Early Church.

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter had opportunity to instruct his audience that they, in fact, no longer needed to journey to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish feasts,<sup>107</sup> but he did not indicate anything like this in his preaching

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<sup>104</sup> Articles: *When Did the Disciples of Jesus Stop Observing the Old Testament Laws and How the Apostles Were Expelled from Christianity* by Ron Ammundsen; *Worship in the Early Church* by Sue Bracefield; *A History of Christian Art* by Bernard Dick; Books: *The Early Christians: A Sourcebook on the Witness of the Early Church*, Eberhard Arnold; *Worship in the Early Church*, Ralph P. Martin; *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity*, Oskar Skarsaune; *The First Rites: Worship in the Early Church*, Kenneth Stevenson.

<sup>105</sup> Some scholars set later dates.

<sup>106</sup> Acts 1:6

<sup>107</sup> Daniel 9:27; Matthew 27:50-51; Acts 15:19-29; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14.

that day. This seems to indicate that Peter continued to celebrate the Jewish feasts at the temple in Jerusalem. If Peter were saying and doing anything contrary to the Jewish customs and traditions, he would not have been welcome in the temple. Yet, he and the other apostles went to the temple daily - at the prescribed times of worship.<sup>108</sup> It is clear that after coming to faith in Christ, and after receiving the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, Peter also continued in the Jewish customs and traditions.

Another example found in Acts 10<sup>109</sup> is that Peter still considered Gentiles and certain foods unholy and unclean.

Luke referred to Nicolas from Antioch, one of the first Christian deacons, as "a convert to JUDAISM".<sup>110</sup> From this reference, we can see that Christianity was understood to be a sect of Judaism at that time. When the first Gentiles received the Holy Spirit, the disciples and apostles were amazed, because up until that time (5 years after Christ ascended), the only Christians were Jews.<sup>111</sup> It wasn't until 10 – 15 years after Jesus ascended that His gospel was preached to Gentiles in Antioch. And it was there in Antioch that His disciples were first called "Christians" instead of being called "the sect of the Nazarenes" or "The Way".<sup>112</sup> It is interesting to point out that, while it was God's plan for the gospel to go out to the nations,<sup>113</sup> the first and second

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<sup>108</sup> Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:11-13, 20, 42

<sup>109</sup> vv.10-16, 28

<sup>110</sup> Acts 6:5

<sup>111</sup> Including a few Gentiles who had become full Jewish proselytes by undergoing circumcision. Acts 10:45; 11:1-3, 17-18.

<sup>112</sup> Acts 11

<sup>113</sup> Acts 1:6

generation disciples of Christ saw His gospel as pertaining to Jews: They didn't effectively start preaching the gospel to Gentiles until they were scattered from Jerusalem because of the persecution they were experiencing from Herod and the Jewish religious leaders.<sup>114</sup>

The fact that Ananias was referred to as "*a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews*" in Damascus, again indicates that Christians were seen as belonging to a Jewish sect. And this is my main point - early Christians like Ananias had continued to observe many aspects of the law.

When Saul was seeking out Christians to persecute, he went looking for them in Jewish synagogues.<sup>115</sup> Now, it would definitely be accurate to point out that when Paul attended synagogue, he preached Christ as the Jewish Messiah.<sup>116</sup> But it would be an assumption to say that the only reason he attended synagogue was to evangelize Jews. At that time, Christianity was still considered a Jewish sect, Christians attended synagogue, and Paul was one of those Christians who attended synagogue "as usual" or "as was his custom".<sup>117</sup> Paul also went to the temple to pray at the prescribed times.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Acts 11:19-20; 12:1-4

<sup>115</sup> Acts 9:1-2; 22:19; 26:11

<sup>116</sup> Acts 13:5; 14-16; 38-39

<sup>117</sup> Acts 14:1; 17:2 NIV; Cf. Acts 9:19-20; 13:42-43

<sup>118</sup> Acts 22:17



## Not If, but Why?

The astute reader may be asking: "If Paul practiced Jewish rituals, customs and traditions, what are we to make of his writings in which he teaches Christians that these things have no place in the New Covenant?"<sup>119</sup> That's a good question! And it needs to be answered. The answer is a bit complicated, but also very interesting to uncover – at least it was for me. We will get to that in the next article.

I think another question is just as significant: **Not IF** there were Jewish Roots to early Christian worship, **but rather WHY were there Jewish Roots to early Christian worship?** Some of the explanation as to WHY there were Jewish Roots is simple to understand, and some of the explanation is more spiritually discerned.

Let's save the spiritual part for later and deal firstly with the more obvious observations: Since Jesus was sent "only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel",<sup>120</sup> the first to come to faith in Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah were Jews who naturally continued in their Jewish forms of worship.

Then, added to these converts were those who were called **'God-fearers'**. According to F.F. Bruce, "God-fearers were Gentiles who attached themselves in varying degrees to the Jewish worship and way of life without

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<sup>119</sup> e.g., His letter to the Galatians.

<sup>120</sup> Matthew 15:24

as yet becoming full proselytes.”<sup>121</sup> “God-fearers” frequented both the Jewish temple and synagogues for worship.<sup>122</sup> Some examples of the “God-fearers” are notable Gentiles we read about in the Book of Acts like the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius the Roman centurion, Lydia and Titus Justus.<sup>123</sup> Church historian, Oskar Skarsaune, writes: “We meet a very Jewish Paul, who conducted his mission almost entirely within the bounds of the synagogue and the circle of God-fearing Gentiles attached to it.”<sup>124</sup> ....  
“(His) primary target group among the Gentiles were people who had already visited the synagogue for some time, who had listened to the Scripture readings and a considerable amount of Scripture exposition. In Acts they are called the God-fearers among the Gentiles.”<sup>125</sup> Skarsaune indicates that this type of Gentile was the majority group in the communities Paul wrote to in Rome and Galatia. That statement by Skarsaune is affirmed by Ralph F. Wilson (Fuller Theological Seminary) in his commentary on Acts 13:14-41 – Paul preaching in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (Galatia): “Notice the audience -- Jews and God-fearers. “Men of Israel, and you who fear God” (Acts 13:15, ESV). The NIV’s, “you Gentiles who worship God,” catches the sense. ... These are the uncircumcised Gentiles (mentioned in who are attracted to Jewish monotheism and high moral teaching, but who

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<sup>121</sup> i.e., Full proselytes would need to submit to circumcision, after instruction in Jewish law, the offering of a sacrifice, and baptism. (Ron Ammundsen, *When Did the Disciples of Jesus Stop Observing the Old Testament Laws?*, p. 7 & 8.)

<sup>122</sup> Acts 8:27; 13:16, 42; 14:1; 17:1-4, 17; 18:4.

<sup>123</sup> Acts 8:27; 10:1, 22; 13:16, 26, 43, 49-50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:6-7.

<sup>124</sup> “In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity”, p. 174.

<sup>125</sup> An excerpt from an IVP Interview with Oskar Skarsaune, author of “In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity”.

haven't taken the step of being circumcised and becoming full Jews. ... these God-fearers form Paul's bridge into the Gentile world in various cities in the Roman Empire.”

One could refer to these God-fearers as "want-to-be" Jews; and it is natural that they too would be at home with the Jewish forms of worship.

All the early converts to Christ were considered by both the Romans and the Jews to be a particular sect of the Jewish religion. They were actually called a "sect" by the Jews.<sup>126</sup> Specifically, they were a Jewish sect which believed the Messiah had indeed come in Jesus of Nazareth, and so they were known as "the sect of the Nazarenes".<sup>127</sup> My point is: It was quite natural for these Jews and "want-to-be" Jews to continue worship in the Jewish tradition.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Acts 24:5, 14; 28:22

<sup>127</sup> In fact, the apostle Paul was identified as a leader of the Nazarenes. (Acts 24:5) Cf. Mark 13:6. While they may have been small in number and short-lived, other "sects" had arisen and dissipated which also followed other messiah figures. e.g., Theudas was a messiah-figure with a following mentioned by Gamaliel in Acts 5:36. In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus mentioned a different Theudas, who was also a false messiah in AD 44-46. These groups were considered Jewish sects who believed the messiah had come. They were considered and identified as Jewish – just as a number of other Jewish sects which had emerged during the 400-year Intertestamental period of Israel's history. So, in the eyes and understanding of the Romans and the Jews this "sect of the Nazarenes", which was also called "The Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9; 24:14, 22) - took its place alongside the other Jewish sects - like the Essenes, Herodians, Pharisees, Sadducees, Samaritans, Scribes, and Zealots.

<sup>128</sup> Acts 21:20

# Jesus' Teaching

Jesus said that He was “*sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*”.<sup>129</sup> What, in fact, was Jesus' perspective on these Jewish rituals, customs and traditions? The most significant teaching of Jesus on the subject of worship is in John 4, where He referred to “*worship in Spirit and truth*”.<sup>130</sup> We will deal with that phrase in depth in other articles in this series.

But there are also a number of passages in the synoptic gospels which clearly show that Jesus' teaching was at variance with the Jewish customs and traditions. Jesus taught that one did not need to go to the priests in the temple to have his sins forgiven – one only needed to come to Him.<sup>131</sup> His practices were also at variance with the Jewish customs and traditions regarding fasting,<sup>132</sup> Sabbath laws,<sup>133</sup> and other customs and traditions which He deemed unnecessary burdens and bondages for people.<sup>134</sup> Generally speaking, He taught that the "new cloth" of the New Covenant could not be patched onto the "old cloth" of the Old Covenant. And the "new wine" of the New Covenant could not be kept in "old wineskins" of the Old Covenant.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Matthew 15:24

<sup>130</sup> John 4:23-24

<sup>131</sup> Mark 2:5-12; Luke 5:21-26

<sup>132</sup> Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35

<sup>133</sup> Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-11

<sup>134</sup> Matthew 23:4, 23-24

<sup>135</sup> Mark 2:21-22; Luke 5:36-39

Indeed, it was Jesus' teachings and practices which were contrary to Jewish custom and tradition which led to His Crucifixion. And, it was His Resurrection, Ascension and outpouring of His Spirit which realized a New Covenant with a new "temple" (the Body of Christ)<sup>136</sup> made up of "living stones" offering "living sacrifices" - a "spiritual house" in which are offered "spiritual sacrifices"<sup>137</sup> – an alternative "New and Living Way" of "worship in spirit and truth".<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> John 2:19-22

<sup>137</sup> 1 Peter 2:4-5

<sup>138</sup> We will continue to reflect further on these terms and concepts in these articles.

# The Apostles' Teachings

And what about the first century disciples and apostles of Christ – what was their perspective on these Jewish customs and traditions? Throughout these articles, there will be plenty of scripture references in which we will see that the teaching of the apostles, particularly Paul's and the writer to the Hebrews, make clear distinctions:

- between the Old Covenant temple and the New Covenant "*spiritual house*"<sup>139</sup>
- between the Old Covenant Levitical priesthood and the New Covenant "*kingdom of priests*"<sup>140</sup>
- between the Old Covenant animal sacrifices for sin and the New Covenant "*spiritual, living sacrifices*"<sup>141</sup> of praise and thanksgiving<sup>142</sup>

As Ralph P. Martin summarizes: "The worship the Church offers to God **is essentially spiritual in character**, '*for we worship by the Spirit of God*'".<sup>143</sup> This theme of "**spiritual worship**" runs throughout these articles with an abundance of scripture references.

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<sup>139</sup> 1 Peter 2:5

<sup>140</sup> Revelation 1:6; 5:10; Cf. Exodus 19:6

<sup>141</sup> Romans 12:1

<sup>142</sup> Hebrews 13:15

<sup>143</sup> *Worship in the Early Church*, p. 23. Cf. Philippians 3:3.

A highly related aspect of this theme can be seen in the defense given by Stephen leading up to his martyrdom.<sup>144</sup> Throughout Acts 7, Stephen repeatedly drives this point home: God does not need sacred places for sacred activities at sacred times. (Please note: Stephen's perspective is diametrically contrary to the very "Jewish Roots" and "*elementary principles of the world*" we are discussing.) This is why his Jewish audience was so highly offended, and why he was stoned to death.

- In Acts 6:13, Stephen is accused of speaking evil against "*this place*" – "this place" being the temple, Jerusalem, or Israel. A "root" in the Jewish mindset is that "*this place*" is "sacred". And Stephen's defense is made in response to this Jewish perspective:
- In Acts 7:2-8, Stephen is pointing out that "*the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia*", and that the covenant was being practiced by Abraham before he was given a "promised land", indicating that the blessings of God's covenant are not contingent on a place.
- In Acts 7:9-10, Stephen points out that "God was with Joseph and gave him favor and wisdom" – not in a sacred place, but in Egypt.
- In Acts 7:30-33, Stephen informs his accusers that it was in a wilderness, not Jerusalem, that "*the angel appeared*", and God called the place "holy" – not because of the place, but because of His presence.

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<sup>144</sup> What follows was gleaned from an excellent essay, "Strange Details in Stephen's Defense" by Dennis McCallum, [www.Xenos.org](http://www.Xenos.org)

- In verses 36-38, Stephen reminds them that Moses was able to perform signs and wonders in Egypt and received living oracles in the wilderness, not in the "holy land".
- In Acts 7:41, Stephen pinpoints the reason for people's propensity to want to worship God with "sacred" activities performed in "sacred" places at "sacred" times: He said God's people were "rejoicing in the works of their hands".

The gravitation toward sacred places in which sacred activities are performed at sacred times has to do with the idolatry of that which is material rather than seeking that which is spiritual. My perspective on this is not Gnostic<sup>145</sup> – it is Christian, for it was Christ Himself who said: "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth".<sup>146</sup> I believe we can understand the apostle Paul to be confirming Jesus' perspective on worship when he wrote: "*Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.*"<sup>147</sup>

In his article, "Strange Details in Stephen's Defense", Dennis McCallum writes: "It would be hard to exaggerate the centrality of the sacred land of Israel in the understanding of the covenantal blessings at the heart of Judaism at this time. At the heart of ethnic-religious worldviews are the twin

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<sup>145</sup> It seems fashionable to label "Gnostic" any and all arguments making distinctions between material and spiritual. It also seems to me that those who do this probably know little about Gnosticism.

<sup>146</sup> John 4:24

<sup>147</sup> Colossians 3:2



values of 'Race and Space', or to put it differently, 'Blood and Soil'. These values are hardly unique to first century Judaism. The same terms have been used to understand thought systems such as Nazism. Unfortunately, they would adequately summarize the ethos of much of modern western Christianity. These values can be **dangerous substitutes for real spirituality**, and may stand as barriers to a truly universal, loving, outreaching, and caring form of Christianity. Most of the book of Acts is concerned with God's efforts to overcome the inertia that emanates from the unbalanced application of these two values in the name of religion. By speaking to the issue of sacred space, including the sacred city and sacred land of Israel, Stephen's speech lays a firm ideological foundation for the subsequent movement of the focus of God's work away from both in the following chapters."

The "bottom line" in Stephen's defense was this: **"The Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands"** – it is *"a spiritual house ... being built up to offer spiritual sacrifices"*.<sup>148</sup> God said through both Isaiah and Stephen: *"Heaven is My throne, and earth is the footstool of My feet; what kind of house will you build for Me?" says the Lord, or what place is there for My repose?"*<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> 1 Peter 2:5

<sup>149</sup> Isaiah 66:1; Acts 7:49

**Please note:**

My end goal in this article is NOT to prove that the Jews had this mindset, but rather to investigate WHY CHRISTIANS – from the first century on through the centuries, up to today - also have this mindset. Specifically, what is the spiritual cause behind this phenomenon?

# Apostolicity – To be Restored or Yet to be Fully Established?

There is another significant question to be asked: Even with the teachings of Jesus, and the apostles' teaching, including epistles of Paul, Peter, John, and the writer to the Hebrews regarding the great divide between these Jewish Roots and New Covenant worship in spirit and truth, to what extent did these Jewish Roots remain in the worship of the FIRST CENTURY CHURCH (and beyond)?

Many of us have the impression that after the Day of Pentecost, Jewish Christians immediately started having Charismatic-type "worship services" with a free flow of the gifts of the Spirit unhindered by ecclesiastical form, ritual, or leadership. Many today put forth the "body ministry" of the 1 Corinthians 14:26 as a prototype of the worship meeting of the Early Church.<sup>150</sup> But, a reading of some early church documents will give the opposite impression.<sup>151</sup> And, a number of things in the New Testament scriptures also seem to indicate differently! We have already seen throughout the Book of Acts the first century Christians – including the apostle Paul and his co-workers - attending temple and synagogue. Yet, in the Letter to the Hebrews we see the writer exhorting people not to return to their Jewish Roots. And in his Letter to the Galatians, we find the apostle

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<sup>150</sup> We will be taking "another look" at 1 Corinthians 14:26 in another article.

<sup>151</sup> e.g., *The Didache* IX-XI (before 100 A.D.); Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 65-67 (155-157 A.D.); Tertullian, *Apology* 39 (145-220 A.D.); Cf. "The Early Christians: Annotations to Meetings and Worship", Eberhard Arnold, pp.388-389.

Paul speaking out against the Judaizers. And most significantly, we see Paul addressing something he called "*elementary principles of the world*".

Here, I will repeat something I stated in my first article, *In Search of Ecclesia*:

Most of us have this picture of Church history: We assume the first century Church worshipped in spirit and truth, but then at the end of the first century, Christians began to fall back into various man-made customs, traditions, and organization under the influence of various church fathers and Constantine. And then these man-made customs, traditions and organization continued to increase throughout all Church history – right up to contemporary times. That is the picture painted by almost all presentations of church history, including the ones used in support of the Restoration movements, House Church movements and Organic Church movements. That this is true of the second century and third centuries and beyond is without dispute. What I am questioning is the validity of the assumption that the FIRST CENTURY Church worshiped in spirit and truth.

While I agree that there was a severe spiritual decline after the apostolic period, I however do not believe that the apostolic Church had reached

perfection within first century. Can we really say that they had perfected worship in spirit and truth?

While it is good and necessary to try to determine if specific New Testament passages (Acts & Epistles) are either DESCRIPTIVE of the 1st century church or PRESCRIPTIVE for the church throughout history - IS IT POSSIBLE THAT THERE IS A 3rd CATEGORY? That is, passages in the New Testament (viz. having to do with the New Covenant) which teach and reveal something BUT WERE NOT YET LIVED OUT IN THE 1st CENTURY CHURCH. Namely, things which are commonly accepted as being PRESCRIBED, but we cannot point to New Testament scripture which DESCRIBES that the 1st century church was actually living it out. Is it possible that there are New Covenant realities the Holy Spirit revealed to and through Paul and his writings, that we ASSUME because he wrote it, the 1st century church was actually doing it? If these are merely assumptions on our part, it implies that there are New Covenant realities in the scriptures that still lie before us to be fully embraced and lived out.

We need to discuss all these things in order to determine: To what extent, at this point in history, has the teachings of Jesus and His apostles actually freed God's people of the bondage of the "elementary principles of the world"? And, to what extent has this brought them beyond Jewish Roots into New Covenant worship in spirit and truth?

In these articles, I am suggesting that under the influence of "*the elementary principles of the world*", the first century Church never moved beyond their Jewish Roots.<sup>152</sup> The first century Jewish Christians, along with the Gentile churches, continued in these "*elementary principles of the world*". And these man-made customs, traditions and organization simply continued on into the second and third centuries and beyond. Whereas, in the New Testament times, the "*elementary principles of the world*" manifested as "Jewish Roots" – specifically continuing in the shadow of the law AFTER CHRIST MADE THE LAW OBSOLETE (Hebrews 8:13); these same "*elementary principles of the world*" can also be identified now in other terms – such as "religious idolatry", "human-organization", "Babylonian church system", and "the world system".<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> At the very least, this continued up to the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.

<sup>153</sup> We will also be discussing a less familiar term coined by Jacques Ellul – "Technique" – which very much characterizes the contemporary church.

# Apostolic Hypocrisy?

The astute reader may now wish to point out that the writer still needs to:

- 1) Identify *"the elementary principles of the world"*.
- 2) Show their connection with Jewish Roots.
- 3) Show their connection with the man-made customs and traditions in the worship of both the Jewish and Gentile Christian communities throughout Church history.

This we will do. But to first, we must clear away any confusion and doubt about the practice and writings of the apostles, for it is their God-inspired writings which are our sole authority for faith and practice. Is there a contradiction between what we see them practicing in the Book of Acts and what they wrote in their epistles? We need to see things in their historical context. And we need to see that the apostles and disciples were being led by the Spirit. What we read about in the Book of Acts is actually a period of transition – spiritual change. The New Covenant was inaugurated at Jesus' death. But His apostles and disciples were not yet walking in the full understanding of it. They received the gift of the Holy Spirit and revelation on the Day of Pentecost, but that was just the beginning. Following were a number of crisis experiences with the Spirit of Christ, through which, they were taught and led by the Spirit - just as Jesus had promised.<sup>154</sup> In the next article, we will discuss being Led By the Spirit. The apostle Paul was

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<sup>154</sup> John 14:26; 16:12-13

led by the Spirit out of the shadow of the Old Covenant into the light of the New Covenant – out of the bondage to "*the elementary principles of the world*" into worship in spirit and truth. May we experience the same.



## 5. Led by the Spirit

*"For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."*

Romans 8:14

*"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, **He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.**"*

John 14:26

*"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, **He will guide you into all the truth;** for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and **He will disclose to you what is to come.**" John 16:12-13*

# Introduction

A primary goal of this article is to present the concept of being "**led by the Spirit**"<sup>155</sup> in the way I believe Jesus presented it to His disciples and apostles.<sup>156</sup> What Jesus promised in the Gospels regarding the leading of the Spirit can be seen to be fulfilled in the Book of Acts. Primarily, we will be looking into the life and ministry of Paul with a view to how we can also be "**led by the Spirit**" today.

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<sup>155</sup> Romans 8:14

<sup>156</sup> John 14:26; 16:12-13

# A Season of Spiritual Transition

## A Brief Historical Survey based on the Book of Acts<sup>157</sup>

An investigation of the Book of Acts will clearly show that the worship of the Early Church was primarily influenced by Jewish custom and tradition based in the Old Covenant. Yet, it is commonly held that the Early Church was very much “led by the Spirit”. Can we make the assumption then, that the Early Church was “led by the Spirit” to continue to worship under the shadow of the Old Covenant? That hardly sounds conceivable, does it. Yet, what the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to record in the Book of Acts regarding this, apparently contradicts what He inspired the apostle Paul to write in his epistles with regards to his strong warnings against "mixing" the Old and New Covenants – "law and grace" – "works and faith" – "flesh and spirit", etc. But we see that the same Paul who wrote these things also continued to practice these Jewish customs and traditions! How are we to reconcile this apparent contradiction? As I mentioned in the previous article, I believe there are two keys to the clarification of this apparent contradiction: Firstly, **we need to see the historical context.** Secondly, **we need to understand “the leading of the Spirit” in that historical context.**

In the Book of Acts, Luke records what was a period of spiritual transition for the apostles and disciples of Jesus. The more one reflects on it, the more

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<sup>157</sup> Specifically, 33 A.D., the Ascension of Christ & the Feast of Pentecost, to 64 A.D., the year the apostle Paul is believed to have been martyred.

astounding it appears! This transition is from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. The New Covenant had been inaugurated with Jesus' death.<sup>158</sup> But how much understanding of the New Covenant did the Church actually have during the first few decades of her history?

At Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus ascended, the apostles received the promised gift of the Holy Spirit enabling them to receive spiritual revelation.<sup>159</sup> Reading the early preaching of Peter and Stephen, one can see that now they understood, from the Old Testament scriptures, that Jesus of Nazareth was, in fact, the Christ of the Covenant.<sup>160</sup> But the purpose of this article is to point out that it took decades, involving crisis experiences with the Holy Spirit, for the apostles and disciples to receive further revelation regarding the New Covenant. This process of receiving increased spiritual revelation is essentially what it means to be "led by the Spirit".<sup>161</sup>

Their increased spiritual revelation had to do with understanding this: *"... that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."*<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Hebrews 9:16-18

<sup>159</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:10-16

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Acts 2:14-36; 3:11-26; Acts 7

<sup>161</sup> Romans 8:14

<sup>162</sup> Cf. Ephesians 3:1-6; Colossians 1:25-27

An immediate consequence of the gospel going to the Gentiles was the emergence of the issue of “**Church and Culture**” - specifically, Gentiles adopting Jewish religious customs and traditions. Initially, there was, of course, the issue of circumcision – “Do Gentiles need to be circumcised in order to be followers of Messiah?” But the Jewish cultural issues were by no means limited to circumcision.

However, circumcision was certainly an issue for the “*Judaizers*”<sup>163</sup>, who were also referred to as “*the party of the circumcision*”<sup>164</sup>, or “*certain men from James*”<sup>165</sup>. As I said, the fundamental issue was whether or not Gentile converts to Christ needed to be circumcised. This was an issue because, initially, **Christianity**, or “the Way”<sup>166</sup> or “the sect of the Nazarenes”,<sup>167</sup> as it was called, was considered to be a particular sect of the Jewish religion. To be a Christian was to be a certain type of Jew – that is, a Jew who believed the Messiah had indeed come. And to be a Jew – fully - one needed to be circumcised.

The issue of circumcision was supposedly settled at the first church conference in Jerusalem,<sup>168</sup> but was also addressed in no uncertain terms in the epistles and teachings of the apostle Paul: Namely, circumcision would

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<sup>163</sup> Jewish Christians who taught that Christians – both Jews and Gentiles – must live according to Jewish customs, including circumcision. (Galatians 2:14)

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Acts 15:1, 5; 21:20-21; Galatians 2:12; Philippians 3:2, Titus 1:10

<sup>165</sup> Galatians 2:12

<sup>166</sup> Acts 9:2

<sup>167</sup> Acts 24:5, 12

<sup>168</sup> Acts 15

not be required for Gentile converts to Christ,<sup>169</sup> because it was determined that circumcision meant nothing in the New Covenant.<sup>170</sup>

The other Jewish cultural issues I am referring to, in addition to circumcision, are the many Jewish religious customs and traditions which were cultural carry-overs into the Early Christian Church. These were customs and traditions which had to do with sacralized places, times, and activities. **By "sacralized" I mean: The setting apart, dedicating and consecrating of places, times, and activities by separating them from the believer's everyday life and placing them in a special religious category.** Citing these sacralizations, and their association with "*the elementary principles of the world*", is the primary theme of this series of articles.<sup>171</sup> In the Early Church, this sacralization mainly took the form of **various religious customs and traditions which were deeply-rooted in the Jewish culture.** These customs and traditions were both part of the Mosaic Law, but also man-made additions which could be identified as what Jesus referred to as **the "traditions" of the elders, Scribes and Pharisees.**<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> e.g., Galatians 5:2, 6

<sup>170</sup> Galatians 6:15; Cf. 5:2-6

<sup>171</sup> For excellent background reading on the concept of "sacralization" I would highly recommend: "The Reformers Stepchildren" and "The Making of a Hybrid" by Leonard Verduin; "The Humiliation of the Word" by Jacques Ellul; and the following essays by Dennis McCallum published on the Xenos Christian Fellowship website ([www.Xenos.org](http://www.Xenos.org) > "Resources" > "Essays": "Objectification of Religion", "Formalism: What It Is and Why Not"; as well as "Paul's Usage of ta stoicheia tou kosmou" by Gary Lashmutts.

<sup>172</sup> Matthew 15:6; Mark 7:13

Even the apostle Paul had "traditions" which he passed on to churches: He told the Philippian church to both "*observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us*" and "*... join in following my example*".<sup>173</sup> The Greek scholar, Marvin R. Vincent, clarified Paul's meaning: "Not imitators of Christ in common with me, but be together, jointly, **imitators of me.**"<sup>174</sup> Also, Paul exhorted the Corinthian church to "*be imitators of me*", and also commended the church because it "*held firmly to the traditions just as I delivered them to you*".<sup>175</sup> The Greek scholar, James Strong, specifies that the word refers to "**Jewish traditional laws**". The apostle Paul said the exact same things to the Thessalonians.<sup>176</sup>

One of the main points I hope to make through these articles is that, while the specifically Jewish customs and traditions eventually disappeared from the Gentile church<sup>177</sup>, **OTHER sacralized places, times and activities have been implemented in the Church – even during the first century, as well as, in subsequent centuries of church history. And this sacralization still exists in the visible Church<sup>178</sup> today.**

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<sup>173</sup> Philippians 3:17, Greek: *tupos*, Strong's # 5179; and Greek: *summimetes*, Strong's # 4831.

<sup>174</sup> Vincent's New Testament Word Studies

<sup>175</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1, Greek: *mimetes*, Strong's # 3402; and 1 Corinthians 11:2, Greek: *paradosis*, Strong's #3862.

<sup>176</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1:6 and 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

<sup>177</sup> That took about 300 years! The decision of the first church conference in Jerusalem in 48 or 49 A.D. (Acts 15) regarding Gentile converts to Christ not needing to be circumcised, and Roman destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D., were definitely benchmarks; but most biblical scholars and historians agree that it wasn't until Constantine's "Letter to the Churches" in 325 A.D. that the separation of Christianity from Judaism was made distinct and definite in order to establish Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire by making it more accommodating to the pagan "mystery religions".

<sup>178</sup> Concerning the term, "visible church": I believe the perfection of the Church exists now in the spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:27) It is God's purpose and our calling to manifest that perfection in the visible Church. But the

# Beyond "The Elementary Principles of the World"

Both from the Book of Acts and the Letter to the Galatians we can see how the apostles (primarily Paul, but also Peter), **ALTHOUGH NOT ARRIVING AT PERFECTION**, were **"led by the Spirit"**<sup>179</sup>:

- From seeing oneself in Adam to **seeing oneself in Christ**
- From the law of Moses to **the law of Spirit of life in Christ Jesus**
- From being either Jewish or Gentile to **being "in Christ"**
- From culture to **spirit**
- From sacralized activities to **"The Fellowship of the Spirit"**

Let's do a brief survey the Books of Acts<sup>180</sup>, to see how the apostle Paul was "led by the Spirit" in this season of spiritual transition – out from the shadows of the Old Covenant, and into the light of the New Covenant.

**However, we must keep in mind that although the apostles gained revelation from the Spirit of Truth through crises experiences, and they BEGAN to implement the truths they were seeing as they walked in obedience – neither in their personal lives nor in the life of the first century church, was the New Covenant fully manifested. THAT FULNESS, in fact, still lies before us!**

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visible Church in this age contains "wheat and tares" - many imperfections. What now exists in the spirit will not be fully manifest until the coming age. Cf. 1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 12:22-24.

<sup>179</sup> Romans 8:14; John 14:26; 16:12-13

<sup>180</sup> For a chronology of Acts, Paul's missionary journeys and Paul's epistles, I am drawing from 1) "A Chronology of Paul" from "Dictionary of Paul and His Letters" (IVP), 2) The ESV Study Bible (Crossway Bibles), 3) "The Pauline Epistles" by J. Hampton Keathley III (Bible.org). See Appendix I.



# Pentecost

In 33 A.D., 50 days after the Lord ascended, Peter and the disciples **received the gift of the Holy Spirit enabling them to receive spiritual revelation.** That same year, because of Saul's persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem, Philip (along with others) fled to Samaria. There, Philip preached the gospel to the Samaritans. Then, Peter and John went down to Samaria from Jerusalem and prayed for the Samaritans to **receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** The Samaritans were "half-breeds" – half-Jews, as it were.<sup>181</sup> It is a well-known fact that *"the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans"*.<sup>182</sup> Jesus, of course had met with a Samaritan woman at the well, but as far as recorded history shows, this Jewish-Samaritan interaction was a first-time experience for the Church after Pentecost.

And after this, Philip was **directed by the Holy Spirit** to bring the gospel to an Ethiopian Eunuch – the treasurer of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia. Luke tells us the man was returning from having worshipped in Jerusalem. But Luke does not tell us if he was a proselyte to Judaism or a God-fearing Gentile. He was almost definitely not a Jew because eunuchs were not allowed to *"enter the assembly of the Lord"*.<sup>183</sup> So, he was most likely the first Gentile convert to Christ.<sup>184</sup> In any case, Philip's ministry, both in Samaria

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<sup>181</sup> Assyrians who were relocated to Israel inter-married with the lower-class Jews who were not carried away into captivity. 2 Kings 17:24

<sup>182</sup> John 4:9

<sup>183</sup> Deuteronomy 23:1

<sup>184</sup> But it was Cornelius, a Gentile God-fearer in Caesarea (Acts 10), and not this Ethiopian Eunuch, who was cited at the first church conference as an example when the apostles were discussing Gentiles coming to faith in

and to the Ethiopian Eunuch, was the first fulfillment of the Lord's command in Acts 1:8 – that is, that the gospel was to go beyond Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and the remotest parts of the earth.

In 34 A.D., Paul met **the Spirit of Christ** on the road to Damascus and was commissioned by the Lord to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.<sup>185</sup> Paul spent three years in Arabia being **taught by the Spirit** in the Old Testament scriptures.<sup>186</sup> For example, all of his revelation of the gospel – the death, burial and resurrection of the Christ - which he gives in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, was gleaned from Old Testament scriptures. (viz. The only scriptures there were at the time.) After his season in Arabia, in 37 A.D., Paul met with Peter in Jerusalem for affirmation that his understanding of the gospel was in agreement with Peter's.<sup>187</sup>

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Christ. (Acts 15) It may be that this Ethiopian Eunuch wasn't cited simply because Philip wasn't present or wasn't given voice at that church conference.

<sup>185</sup> Acts 9; Galatians 1:15-16

<sup>186</sup> Acts 9:19-22; 26:20; Galatians 1:16-18

<sup>187</sup> Acts 9:26-30; Galatians 1:18

## Peter & Paul

In 38 A.D., Peter also received a spiritual vision which he did not understand – namely, that God now considered the Gentiles as having been "cleansed". When directed by the Holy Spirit, he obediently went to Cornelius, a Gentile God-fearer in Caesarea, but didn't understand why the Lord would send him to Gentiles. As he was preaching to these Gentiles the gospel of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, the Holy Spirit baptized the Gentiles just as He had baptized the Jewish disciples on the Day of Pentecost. Peter saw it happen but didn't understand why God would give His Spirit to Gentiles.<sup>188</sup> This too, was a "first" for the Early Church.

In 48 A.D., Paul visited Jerusalem again.<sup>189</sup> Paul's purpose for the visit should be noted: *"I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain."*<sup>190</sup> He went "**because of a revelation**". I think the conventional interpretation of this is that Jesus appeared to Paul and told him to go to Jerusalem. This could be. But "**the revelation**" could also be understood to be *"the gospel I proclaim among Gentiles"*. Paul received his gospel 'by revelation from Jesus Christ.'<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Acts 10

<sup>189</sup> Galatians 2:1-2

<sup>190</sup> Galatians 2:2 EVS

<sup>191</sup> Galatians 1:11-12

Paul was concerned because the message coming out of Jerusalem – specifically from “*certain men from James*”<sup>192</sup> - was “*a different gospel*”.<sup>193</sup> It required circumcision and following Jewish religious customs and traditions. This message was running contrary to “**the revelation**” Paul was sharing.<sup>194</sup> So, he went to Jerusalem to see if he could straighten out things with the apostles. I would not say that things were totally “straightened out”. But one outcome was that James, Peter and John recognized Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles.<sup>195</sup> The idea of someone being sent to a people group which was not Jewish, was a novel idea for the Early Church.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Galatians 2:12

<sup>193</sup> Galatians 1:6-9

<sup>194</sup> Ephesians 3:6-7; Colossians 1:26-27

<sup>195</sup> Acts 11:27-30; Galatians 2:1-10

<sup>196</sup> Even Jesus was “only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”. Matthew 15:24

# 1<sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey

That same year, Paul embarked from Antioch on his 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey with Barnabas.<sup>197</sup> But, although he did preach the gospel to Gentiles,<sup>198</sup> we see that Paul was still focused on bringing the gospel to the Jews in synagogues.<sup>199</sup> When he experienced rejection from the Jews, he said he would *"turn to the Gentiles"*.<sup>200</sup> But, he, in fact, still continued to preach to Jews in synagogues!<sup>201</sup> Can you see the "stretching" process required when being "led by the Spirit"? The apostles neither understood everything, nor were transformed immediately at Pentecost. Their own personal transformation took decades!

It was probably at this time that Peter visited Antioch. I believe he had journeyed there to hear what Paul had to report about his ministry among the Gentiles.<sup>202</sup> According to what Paul wrote in Galatians 2:11-14, while there in Antioch, Peter would sit at table with the Gentile believers. But with *"the coming of certain men from James"* (i.e., from Jerusalem)<sup>203</sup>, Peter separated himself from the Gentiles, and ate with the Jewish believers. This was the Jewish custom regarding those considered "unclean" for table

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<sup>197</sup> Acts 13:4-14, 26

<sup>198</sup> Acts 14:8-21, 27

<sup>199</sup> Acts 13:5-6, 14-16, 43

<sup>200</sup> Acts 13:46-48

<sup>201</sup> Acts 14:1

<sup>202</sup> It is also possible that Peter had gone to Antioch before this and was there when Paul and Barnabas were sent out to the Gentiles. (Acts 13:1-3). But, if that were the case, it seems Peter's name would have been listed with the others of note in v. 1. But most recent historical research places Peter in Antioch sometime after Paul returned from his 2<sup>nd</sup> mission (Acts 14:26-28) and before the Jerusalem conference. (Acts 15)

<sup>203</sup> Acts 15:1-2 The Judaizers, "the party of the circumcision".

fellowship. Taking Peter's lead, Barnabas and the other Jewish believers followed suit. Paul rebuked Peter in public for his hypocrisy, saying: *"If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles, and not like Jews, how is it that you compel Gentiles to live like Jews?"* This is very interesting! It reveals that when among Gentiles, Peter did not keep all the Jewish customs. Of course, when the *"certain men from James"* came around, he did go back to the Jewish customs in order to look good in their eyes; and Paul tells us that Barnabas and the other Jewish Christians followed suit.<sup>204</sup>

From this passage and other scripture references we can see that "culture" – that is, *"living as Jews"* or *"living as Gentiles"* was an issue for the first century church – as it has been throughout all church history and also today.

These same religious-cultural issues came to a head with the question of whether or not Gentile converts to Christ needed to be circumcised. It was in 49 A.D. that the Church held its first conference in Jerusalem to address the dictates of the Judaizers. The decision regarding Gentile converts to Christ was:

*" ... that they abstain from things contaminated by idols, and from fornication, and from what is strangled, and from blood. For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."*<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Galatians 3:13

<sup>205</sup> Acts 15:20-21 & 28-29

Please notice that the Gentiles were not told that they SHOULD NOT be circumcised. They were simply NOT REQUIRED to be circumcised.<sup>206</sup> Again, the Gentiles were not told they SHOULD NOT live according to Jewish customs and traditions. They were simply told that, with the exception of four things, they were NOT REQUIRED to live according to Jewish customs and traditions. But they most certainly could live according to Jewish customs and traditions if they desired to. And James felt assured that the Gentiles would be made well aware of those Jewish customs and traditions, because *"Moses was read in every synagogue in every city"*. In other words, the Jewish Christians were announcing to the Gentile Christians: **"You are not required to, but if you desire to, feel free to continue to worship in the shadow of the Old Covenant!"**

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<sup>206</sup> Up to that point, Gentile proselytes, not the "God-fearers", but the full proselytes, WERE circumcised.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey

In 49 or 50 A.D., Paul left Antioch on a 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey to Corinth with Silas.<sup>207</sup> In Lystra, Paul "picked up" Timothy, and had him circumcised. Why? "*Because of the Jews who were in those parts*".<sup>208</sup> Paul was obviously still focused on the Jews and living according to their customs and traditions. Yet, he continued to see Gentiles coming to faith in Christ – Gentiles like Lydia, a "God-fearer", and the Philippian jailer and his household.<sup>209</sup>

Following his heart and his love for his "*kinsmen according to the flesh*"<sup>210</sup>, Paul continued to reach out into synagogues, winning Jews to Christ.<sup>211</sup> But, at the same time, he also desired to obey the call of God on his life as "*an apostle to the Gentiles*" and continued to preach Christ to "God-fearers" and other Gentiles.<sup>212</sup> Even in Athens, where he preached to the Gentile philosophers at Areopagus<sup>213</sup>, he also went into the synagogue.<sup>214</sup> Paul was now convinced that the gospel was for both the Jew and the Gentile<sup>215</sup>, but he himself, in his personal life, did not stop living according to his Jewish customs and traditions.

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<sup>207</sup> Acts 15:36-18:22

<sup>208</sup> Acts 16:3

<sup>209</sup> Acts 16

<sup>210</sup> Romans 9:1-3

<sup>211</sup> Acts 17:1-3, 10-11

<sup>212</sup> Acts 17:4, 12

<sup>213</sup> Followers of the Greek philosophers, Epicurus, and Zeno.

<sup>214</sup> Acts 17:17-34

<sup>215</sup> Romans 1:16



In Acts 18, we see Paul continuing to preach to Jews and "God-fearers" in the synagogue in Corinth every Sabbath.<sup>216</sup> *"But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'"*<sup>217</sup> This was a definite **change in attitude**. And, we also see a significant **change in his ministry focus** – namely, **from Jew to Gentile.**<sup>218</sup> Yet he himself continued to live according to Jewish customs, like keeping a vow by shearing his hair!<sup>219</sup> AND – in spite of what he had said,<sup>220</sup> he still continued to reach out to Jews in a synagogue!<sup>221</sup> Again, can you see the **"stretching process"** involved in being **"led by the Spirit"**?

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<sup>216</sup> Acts 18:4-5

<sup>217</sup> Acts 18:6

<sup>218</sup> Acts 18:7-11

<sup>219</sup> Acts 18:18. Probably a personal vow of Thanksgiving, not a Nazarite vow, which would have required a sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem. (Numbers 6)

<sup>220</sup> Cf. Acts 18:6

<sup>221</sup> Cf. Acts 18:19-21

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Missionary Journey

On his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey in 54 A.D., Paul ministered again in a synagogue – this time for 3 months in Ephesus!<sup>222</sup> But this time, in response to Jewish resistance to the gospel, we see a significant change in the locus of Paul's ministry – namely, from synagogue to other places which were not "designated" for worship or religious activities – places like houses and public places like *"the School of Tyrannus"*.<sup>223</sup>

In Acts 20:6, the fact that Luke mentions *"the feast of Unleavened Bread"*, which immediately follows Passover, seems to indicate that Paul and his companions observed the feasts.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Acts 19:8

<sup>223</sup> Acts 19:9, 20:8 & 28:30; Cf. 18:7

<sup>224</sup> As a temporary “aside” which will have significance later in these articles: In Acts 20:7, “breaking of bread” on “the first day of the week” is mentioned. According to Jewish chronology, this “Sunday” actually began at sundown on Saturday night when the Sabbath ended. But *there was no such Jewish custom of breaking bread on the first day of the week*. In the Jewish culture, the term, “breaking of bread”, merely applies to any meal. So, IF this was a custom, *it was a “Christian” custom, and not a Jewish custom*. But the fact that this was practiced only in Ephesus<sup>224</sup> – possibly only that one time, because Paul was visiting – *in no way establishes this as a universal Christian custom or tradition*. Also: 1 Corinthians 16:2 does NOT mention a “collection” being taken on the first day of the week in a church gathering at Corinth. Greek scholars Vincent and Robertson both give quite a different picture, rendering the phrase: “Lay by him in store (παρ’ ἑαυτῷ τιθέτω θησαυρίζων) Lit., *put by himself treasuring*. Put by at home.” (*Vincent's Word Studies*); and “Lay by him in store (*par' heautōi tithetō thēsaurizōn*). By himself, in his home. Treasuring it (cf. Matthew 6:19 for *thēsaurizō*). (*Robertson's Word Pictures*) *This was not a Christian custom or tradition at church gatherings*.

# Appointment in Jerusalem

Acts 20:16 tells us that Paul wanted to arrive in Jerusalem in time for the feast of Pentecost. A little later in Acts 24:11, he explained to Felix that the reason he journeyed to Jerusalem was “to worship”. Taking into consideration that he was in front of Felix to defend himself and wanting to make the case that the accusations against him as *“stirring up dissension among the Jews”* and *“desecrating the temple”*<sup>225</sup> were false<sup>226</sup>, we can possibly understand why he would make this his stated purpose for going to Jerusalem. But it was certainly not his only purpose for going to Jerusalem. I say this because, he told the elders of Ephesus that *“he was bound in the spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city that bonds and afflictions await me.”*<sup>227</sup> I am more inclined to believe that Paul figured, “Whatever God has planned in Jerusalem, I want it to play to the largest audience possible, so I’ll be sure to be there on the feast of Pentecost.” Indeed, Paul was ready to die in Jerusalem. And during this, his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey, he was clearly saying farewell to the churches in each place, as he knew he would never see them again.<sup>228</sup> No, I’m not absolutely convinced Paul really desired to go to Jerusalem for the purpose of worshipping at the feast of Pentecost. He knew he was continuing to be led

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<sup>225</sup> Acts 24:5-6

<sup>226</sup> Acts 24:12-16

<sup>227</sup> Acts 20:22-24; Cf. 21:4, 9-14

<sup>228</sup> Acts 20:25-38

by the Spirit, but into what, he did not fully understand. Yet, he "was not disobedient to the heavenly vision."<sup>229</sup>

Acts 21-26 relate what happened when Paul arrived in Jerusalem: After Paul had been warmly received by James and the elders, and Paul had shared with them about what the Holy Spirit had done among the Gentiles, what they say to Paul in reply tells us much about the early Christian church, the Jewish leadership, the Jewish Christians, as well as about Paul and his ministry: *"They (James and the elders of Jerusalem) said to him (Paul): You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law;<sup>21</sup> and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs."*<sup>230</sup>

There is plenty of evidence recorded in the Book of Acts, as well as in theological and historical articles,<sup>231</sup> that the early Jewish Christians were, in fact, "zealous for the Law". That is a well-supported fact, and in itself is sufficient for an alternative to the traditional perspective of the Early Church. But there are various schools of thought regarding the statement that Paul was *"teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling*

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<sup>229</sup> Acts 26:19

<sup>230</sup> Acts 21:20-21

<sup>231</sup> Just one example: There are two articles which are very concise, complete, and convincing written by Ron Ammundsen – "When Did the Disciples of Jesus Stop Observing the Old Testament Laws" and "How the Apostles were Expelled from Christianity" (which includes "secular" historical material from "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" by Edward Gibbon). I agree with Ammundsen's historical facts, but do not necessarily agree with his conclusions.

*them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs*". Was this true? Or was it a false accusation? Interestingly, Paul did not actually say if it was true or false.

In Acts 21:17-29, we read that James and the elders in Jerusalem told Paul that in order to prove to the Jews that he was not teaching against circumcision and the Old Covenant customs and traditions, he would need to take a vow which involved shaving his head,<sup>232</sup> purify himself for seven days, and pay for a sacrifice to be offered in the temple – not only for himself, but also for four other men. And this he did, although he never got to the offering part, as a riot broke out and he was arrested. This was an out and out political ploy on the part of the leadership of the church in Jerusalem – and Paul went along with it! Why? We must consider plausible explanations for what clearly looks like hypocrisy.

This is the question: **Why did Paul practice the *"elementary principles of the world"* in his personal life and public ministry from Acts 8 through 21, yet write so strongly against them in Galatians, 2 Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, and Colossians?** In my perspective, this issue came to a crisis point when Paul arrived and was arrested in Jerusalem.

Regarding the idea that Paul was *"teaching all the Jews to forsake Moses... and not to walk according to the customs"*: Some scholars try to prove this to be a

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<sup>232</sup> The Nazarite vow (Numbers 6).

false accusation. Others say that it was a true statement. And some of those in the latter group even go so far as to say that Paul was the originator of "Anti-Semitism". It seems to me that one would have to misinterpret Paul's writings, and totally ignore passages like Romans 9-11, in order to perceive Paul as an Anti-Semite. But never-the-less, I think it is quite possible that Paul, in fact, **WAS NOT** "*teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.*" That is, he had **NOT YET** done so - not through his life and ministry, nor through his epistles.<sup>233</sup> But, as I said, this issue had reached a **crisis point**, and I believe a **turning point**, in which Paul would have a **spiritual breakthrough** resulting in very different perspectives on the law which are found in his Letter to the Galatians, his Letter to the Romans, his 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter to the Corinthians, his Letter to the Philippians, and his Letter to the Colossians.

Notice that the accusation was that Paul was telling Jews to forsake Mosaic circumcision and customs. As a Jew himself, Paul was actually practicing those things. And I believe that for a few decades<sup>234</sup> he perceived it to be normal for all those who were Jews to "live like Jews"<sup>235</sup> - even if they were

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<sup>233</sup> According to my chronology, at this point, Paul had only written 1 & 2 Thessalonians (50/51 A.D.); 1 Corinthians (55 A.D.); 1 Timothy (55 A.D.); and possibly 2 Corinthians (56 A.D.) According to the Southern Galatia theory, Paul wrote Galatians in 48 A.D. just prior to the church conference in Jerusalem (Acts 15); but I favor the Northern Galatia theory supporting a later dating, with Galatians being written after 2 Corinthians and before Romans (57 A.D.), approximately a year prior to the writing of Philippians and Colossians (58 A.D.).

<sup>234</sup> Viz. 33 A.D. to circa 57 A.D. – approximately 24 years after Jesus ascended.

<sup>235</sup> Galatians 2:14

Christians. But, as he made clear to Peter, he thought it wrong – contrary to the gospel – to tell Gentile Christians to “*live like Jews*”.

In other words, up to this point, Paul had looked on this as merely a “cultural issue”. Specifically: Although salvation came only through faith in Christ – not through works of the law – it was normal and fine for Jewish Christians to practice the cultural and religious customs and traditions grounded in the Old Covenant. But, Paul felt, these same customs and traditions did not need to be enforced – in fact, would be spiritually harmful – if imposed upon Gentile Christians. It was merely a “cultural issue”.

But, I have to say, if in fact, that was Paul’s thinking, I have a problem with that reasoning: Are we to think that Gentile Christians would be susceptible to substituting the works of the law for faith and grace; but that this would not present a spiritual danger for Jewish Christians? That just doesn’t make sense to me. But, then again, I’m not Paul. I’m not “*circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness, which is in the Law, found blameless.*”<sup>236</sup> But, apparently, that was how Paul thought for a few decades - from 33 to 57 A.D. – 24 years after Jesus ascended.

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<sup>236</sup> Philippians 3:5-6

## “Becoming All Things to All Men”

The only scriptural explanation for Paul’s reasoning and practice of maintaining the cultural and religious customs and traditions of the Old Covenant for the Jewish Christians but not for the Gentile Christians is this which he stated in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23: <sup>19</sup>“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. <sup>20</sup>To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under law, as under law though not being myself under law, so that I might win those who are under law; <sup>21</sup>to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. <sup>22</sup>To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. <sup>23</sup>I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”

Later, Paul also said, “Give no offense either to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.”<sup>237</sup> And this he spoke regarding eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols, which was one of the four taboos the Jerusalem elders gave to Gentile Christians.<sup>238</sup> Paul said, one truly born of the Spirit is free to eat or not eat meat sacrificed to idols. But one should do whatever would respect the conscience of the person you are attempting to minister to: Eat the meat if the non-believer sets it before you; but don’t eat it if it will offend a non-believer.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:32-33

<sup>238</sup> Acts 15:29

<sup>239</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:19-33



Firstly, I affirm the idea that because Paul was, in fact, *“under the law of Christ”*, and had *“the law of the Spirit of life in Christ”* within, he was spiritually enabled to be *“as a Jew”*, or *“as under law”*, or *“as without law”*, and *“as weak”*, and *“as all things to all men”*, and *“as pleasing all men in all things”* – all without spiritual harm to himself. Jesus of Nazareth did it. Paul did it. Those who are truly born of the Spirit can do it. And I affirm Paul’s motivation to *“do all things for the sake of the gospel”* in order to *“by all (these) means save some”*. Paul was very serious about winning Jews to Christ<sup>240</sup> and *“diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit”*<sup>241</sup> - as we should be also.

For example, a legitimate witness could be: Attending a Shabbat service or some Jewish holiday service at a synagogue with an acquaintance in order to earn his trust, so that he might be receptive to your sharing your testimony of faith in Christ, while you yourself remain free of legalistic bondage. On the other hand, it would be an illegitimate witness to your friend by becoming a member of a Zionist political movement to work towards the rebuilding of the temple and the restoration of animal sacrifices in Jerusalem. The first is saying, “I respect your culture.” The second is saying, “We’re on the same team.”

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<sup>240</sup> Romans 9:1-3

<sup>241</sup> Ephesians 4:3

## Offending

*“the thousands who are zealous for the Law”*<sup>242</sup>

So, what did Paul mean when he said he *“became all things to all men”*? I’m not absolutely certain. I am more interested in the New & Living Way. But I am certain of this: He was saying something of a radically (fundamentally) different nature to BOTH Gentile and Jewish Christians when he wrote his letters to the Galatians, Colossians, Romans, and Philippians.<sup>243</sup> I want to stress that what he said in these letters, the Holy Spirit did not intend for Gentile Christians only, but also for Jewish Christians. What he said in these letters was NOT culture-oriented – it was NOT dispensational, that is, it was NOT making a distinction between a Jewish and a Gentile approach to spirituality. What he wrote in those epistles was simply New Covenant – *“a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised ....”*<sup>244</sup> (Please read the scripture references in this footnote.)

Do you remember what James said about the *“thousands who were zealous for the Law”*? How do you think these Pauline statements sounded to them?:

- *“Faith in Christ plus works of the law is a different gospel from the gospel of Christ.”*<sup>245</sup> *If you preach that gospel, may you be accursed.”*<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Acts 21:20

<sup>243</sup> All these epistles were written to BOTH Gentile and Jewish Christians. Cf. Galatians 3:1-5, 23-25; Romans 2:17-24; 7:1, 4-6; Colossians 2:13-14. Hebrews, which may or may not have been written by Paul, was obviously written to Jewish Christians; and makes the most complete distinction between Mosaic Law and New Covenant. Cf. Hebrews 8:13

<sup>244</sup> Colossians 3:11; Galatians 3:28; Romans 10:12; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Cf. Ephesians 2:14-18; 3:1-10

<sup>245</sup> Galatians 1:6-7

<sup>246</sup> Galatians 1:8-9

- *“The law nullifies the grace of God and Christ’s death on the cross.”<sup>247</sup>*
- *“All you who rely on works of the law are under a curse.”<sup>248</sup>*
- *“If you live by the law, you are living like a slave.”<sup>249</sup>*
- *“All you who want to be justified by the law, are fallen from grace and severed from Christ.”<sup>250</sup>*

Does that sound like the Paul who *“gives no offense either to Jews or to Greeks, or to the church of God, and tries to please all men in all things”*?<sup>251</sup> Paul wrote very similar things in 2 Corinthians, Romans, Colossians, and Philippians. But all of the above statements were taken solely from the Letter to the Galatians.

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<sup>247</sup> Galatians 2:21

<sup>248</sup> Galatians 3:10

<sup>249</sup> Galatians 4:1-11, 21-31

<sup>250</sup> Galatians 5:4

<sup>251</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:32-33

# Turning Point

When did Paul write these things?<sup>252</sup> Specifically: Did Paul write these things before or after living according to the law in public for 22 years,<sup>253</sup> culminating in Jerusalem with his participating in a political ploy to please the Jews by taking a vow, shaving his head, undergoing 7 days of purification, and paying for a sacrifice to be offered in the temple? Did Paul write those words before or after he spent 22 years contradicting them?

Some believe he wrote Galatians in 48 A.D. - 7 years before he arrived in Jerusalem. Some others believe he wrote Galatians in 53 or 54 A.D. - 1 or 2 years **before** arriving in Jerusalem.<sup>254</sup> A few, like myself, believe he wrote Galatians shortly after he arrived in Jerusalem in 55 A.D. while in prison in Caesarea, or in 58 A.D. while in prison in Rome – after coming to that culminating crisis in Jerusalem.

I try to imagine myself in Paul's place: For 22 years he was growing in his understanding of the implications of the gospel - relating it to various issues like Jewish and Gentile cultures and the Mosaic law, gaining more and more revelation and understanding; and then having it culminate with that political ploy of the Jerusalem elders, going through that fiasco with the convicting

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<sup>252</sup> Please see Appendix I concerning chronology, and Appendix II concerning the dating of the Letter to the Galatians.

<sup>253</sup> 33 – 55 A.D.

<sup>254</sup> Placing the location of writing the Galatian letter in Ephesus or Greece, even with the later dating, still makes Paul's contradictory behavior in Jerusalem just as problematic. But, as with Peter's betrayal of the Lord (Luke 22:54-62), I suppose it is quite possible that Paul also could have acted in such a hypocritical way.

presence and instructing voice of the Holy Spirit through it all. I'm inclined to believe that with the climax of his arrest in Jerusalem, there was a breaking point – a turning point. Now, with increased knowledge, insight, understanding, and wisdom – along with extended time for reflection which prison afforded him, Paul started getting his thoughts crystalized “on paper”<sup>255</sup>, so to speak, and wrote the bulk of his epistles – including 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philippians, and Colossians<sup>256</sup> – in which we find truths specifically germane to New Covenant worship in spirit and truth.

In Galatians and Colossians, he specifically writes of "*the elementary principles of the world*", WHICH TAKE THE FORM OF THESE RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS. And from this point onward Paul stops his personal practice of these things and warns BOTH Jewish and Gentile against them. From about 56 or 57 A.D., Paul began to demonstrate A New and Living Way - in both word and deed – namely, THE NEW COVENANT which replaces the Old Covenant (now obsolete<sup>257</sup>) for BOTH Jewish and Gentile Christians. So, it is not contradiction and hypocrisy that we see in the life and ministry of Paul – rather, what we see is being Led by the Spirit into spiritual growth and transformation.

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<sup>255</sup> i.e., His epistles.

<sup>256</sup> Also, Ephesians and Philemon; and possibly, Hebrews.

<sup>257</sup> Hebrews 8:13

# Spiritual Hurdles

Why did it take Paul more than two decades to see the operation of “the elementary principles of the world” at work in the obsolete Old Covenant customs and traditions? This is a bit of a “rhetorical question” in that only the Holy Spirit is privy to the transformation process that needed to take place in Paul’s heart and mind.<sup>258</sup> But, I would like to point out some of the spiritual issues or hurdles which Paul and the other apostles encountered and had to “work their way through”:

Paul was a Jew. He referred to himself as *“a Hebrew of Hebrews”*.<sup>259</sup> The Jews were not waiting for Messiah to bring a NEW Covenant, but rather, a RENEWED Covenant.<sup>260</sup> This is what the apostles believed had happened: The Messiah had come in Jesus of Nazareth. The Promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, was poured out in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. From the Jewish perspective, God had “RENEWED” the covenant, just as the prophets had prophesied.<sup>261</sup> Now, the mission was to tell all of Israel the good news. It was only after the Holy Spirit began to also fall on Gentiles, that the apostles began to think about any of the issues related to the Gentile converts to Christ.

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<sup>258</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:11 & 15

<sup>259</sup> Philippians 3:5

<sup>260</sup> e.g., Peter’s message in Acts 2:14-36 and Stephen’s message in Acts 7:2-53. This is certainly the “orthodox” Jewish perspective, as stated in contemporary Jewish theology: Cf. “Covenant”, Jewish Encyclopedia, [www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4714-covenant](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4714-covenant); and “Is Jeremiah’s ‘New Covenant’ a Prophecy Fulfilled by the New Testament?” by Gerald Sigal, Jews for Judaism, <https://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/is-jeremiahs-qnew-covenantq-jeremiah-3131-34-a-prophecy-fulfilled-by-the-new-testament/>

<sup>261</sup> Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Isaiah 54:9-10, 13-14.

To the Jews, God had already given the Law. Now He had also given the Spirit. To the Gentiles, God was giving the Spirit; but did He also intend to give them the Law to the Gentiles? That was the issue the apostles needed to sort out for themselves. The Judaizers – “*certain men from James*”- said “Yes, Gentiles also need to worship according to the letter of the Law.” Personally, I have the impression that Peter, and more so, James, were content with this perspective, since they were not called to the Gentiles as Paul was, and they spent their time primarily in Jerusalem, immersed in the Jewish culture. For them, to continue in the Old Covenant customs and traditions was the “natural’ thing to do.

As we’ve seen in the Book of Acts, Paul, as a Jew, also continued in these Jewish customs and traditions. But, at the same time, he opposed the Judaizers, because he did not want to be like the scribes and Pharisees Jesus condemned for putting unnecessary “heavy burdens” on people – in this case the Gentile converts to Christ.<sup>262</sup> Paul (and the other apostles) had to work their way through religious-cultural issues. Did God have different requirements for the different cultures? A kind of cultural dispensationalism<sup>263</sup>? Maybe the Mosaic customs and traditions would still apply for Jewish Christians, but not necessarily for Gentile Christians? But again, Paul eventually came to the conclusion that these things –

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<sup>262</sup> Galatians 6:12-13; Cf. Matthew 23:1-4; Luke 11:46.

<sup>263</sup> In the sense of one program of salvation for Jews and a different program for Gentiles. (I am NOT a dispensationalist.)

religious and cultural customs and traditions - in fact, violated the New Covenant.

Have you struggled with “hating the sin and loving the sinner”? Does it sometimes seem almost impossible to *“speak the truth in love”*? Certainly, these are things that can only be reconciled by The Spirit of Grace. Manifesting these attributes of God, which seem to be contradictory, can require a spiritual transformation process in which it can take some time to learn how to be led by the Spirit as to how to present truth in love.

In a similar way, I see the apostle Paul in this kind of transformation process the first two decades of his life and ministry in the Spirit of Christ. He eventually came into a unity of seemingly contradictory aspects of New Covenant life and ministry in the Spirit. And most likely because of his God-given calling and gifting to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, more so than James and Peter, Paul was enabled to “see beyond” the letter of the law into the faith and grace of the New Covenant.

As we discussed, Paul was also motivated to *“pursue the things which make for peace and the building up (not the tearing down) of one another”* – particularly between Jewish and Gentile Christians<sup>264</sup> - *“showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (For) there is one Body and one Spirit”*<sup>265</sup>. He saw that in the New Covenant, Jesus

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<sup>264</sup> Romans 14:19-20

<sup>265</sup> Ephesians 4:2-4



made peace – making both the Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians “one new man” by breaking down the barrier of the dividing wall – the enmity - which is the law of commandments contained in ordinances.”<sup>266</sup> Paul declared, “There is neither Jew nor Greek ... all are one in Christ Jesus<sup>267</sup> .... There is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised ... but Christ is all and in all.”<sup>268</sup> Paul saw the Body of Christ unified in the New Covenant. Thus, it was primarily Paul who came to see that Christ, not culture, is the foundation of the Church.<sup>269</sup>

Paul exhorted the Church to not judge, to not place obstacles or stumbling blocks, and to “accept the one who is weak in faith”.<sup>270</sup> And who was “the one weak in faith”? Those who still gravitated toward “the letter of the law”, regulations regarding days, food, and drink,<sup>271</sup> which are examples of “the elementary principles of the world”. Yet, at the same time, he condemned these very things because they kept God’s people in bondage.<sup>272</sup> To me, what makes sense of this apparent contradiction is that Paul had to learn to entrust God’s people to God’s Spirit<sup>273</sup> – THAT is New Covenant ministry.<sup>274</sup> We tend to focus on what people “should” or “should not” do according to what is written in scripture. And then, after instructing them with

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<sup>266</sup> Ephesians 2:11-16

<sup>267</sup> Galatians 3:28

<sup>268</sup> Colossians 3:11

<sup>269</sup> See Appendix III.

<sup>270</sup> Romans 14:1-18

<sup>271</sup> Romans 14:5-6

<sup>272</sup> Galatians 4:3, 9-10; Colossians 2:8, 16, 20-22

<sup>273</sup> This does NOT “come naturally”.

<sup>274</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 3

what is written in the scripture, we expect them to perform according to what is written in scripture. But we are expecting the impossible. Without also nourishing intimate relationship with “the Spirit (who) gives life”, this approach to ministry is merely “the letter (that) kills” – it is NOT New Covenant ministry, it is ministry under the shadow of the Old Covenant.

Like Paul said: “For neither circumcision (doing the law) counts for anything, nor uncircumcision (not doing the law), but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”<sup>275</sup> Paul came to understand that God is Judge, and God looks on the heart; and the spiritual progress of people is by faith, and the Holy Spirit is able to minister His freedom and life to God’s people.<sup>276</sup> But this usually takes some time - just as it did with Paul.

Still, ultimately, God desires (and Paul desired) to see the Church free of “the weak, worthless, and obsolete elementary principles of the world which enslave God’s people”<sup>277</sup>. By the time of his imprisonments in Caesarea and Rome, Paul had come to see these things as clearly something to be accursed<sup>278</sup>, as they were the influence of “dogs, evil workers – the ‘false circumcision’”. And then, Paul was committed to building

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<sup>275</sup> Galatians 6:15-16 (ESV)

<sup>276</sup> The whole of Romans 14.

<sup>277</sup> Galatians 4:3, 9-10; Colossians 2:8, 16, 20-22; Cf. Hebrews 8:13

<sup>278</sup> Galatians 1:8-9

up the “true circumcision” – “who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh”.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Philippians 3:2-3

# Appendix – I

## Christ & Culture<sup>280</sup>

The term “culture” can apply to many things. It can apply to ethnic people groups, like “the European culture” or “the Latino culture”. The Google corporation has its unique workplace “culture”. Motorcycle enthusiasts and horse lovers each have their own unique “cultures” as well. And, the term “culture” can also apply to various religious groups, like Evangelicals or Charismatics, et. al. In fact, every religious group develops its own religious “culture”, consisting of their customs and traditions - whether those customs and traditions can be traced to Medieval Liturgy, the Protestant Reformation, Early American Revival Meetings, TED Talks, or America’s Got Talent.

Cultural customs and traditions - specifically religious ones - were issues which the apostles were dealing with in the first century; but these issues were not fully resolved. In fact, cultural and religious customs and traditions have been prevailing issues for the Church throughout all its history. And, for the most part, rather than being "addressed", these customs and traditions have been "absorbed". The visible Church today is still "culture-bound" and needs to be set free of its sacral religious customs and traditions in order to walk in the fullness of the New Covenant.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> The subject matter of two important theological works: “Christ & Culture” by H. Richard Niebuhr and “Christ and Culture Revisited” by D.A. Carson.

<sup>281</sup> See Appendix III: Concerning Culture, an excerpt from A Colony of Heaven.

In the broadest sense of the word, "culture" represents the totality of human expression. As such, "culture" is the creation of Humanity. In the Biblical Worldview, Humanity is "fallen".<sup>282</sup> Therefore "culture" is the creation of fallen Humanity.

In one sense, "culture" is inescapable in this age – Being human, we all live in one culture or another which is part of the world system<sup>283</sup>. But, in another sense, those humans who are "*born of God*" - "*born from above*" – "*born of the Spirit*"<sup>284</sup> – "*led by the Spirit*"<sup>285</sup> – God has called to go beyond "culture", and to be witnesses in their fallen cultures - "*letters to be read by all men*"<sup>286</sup> – "letters" which reveal the heavenly glory of New Covenant realities – realities such as worship in spirit and truth. THAT is our calling.

Therefore, it stands to reason that the powers and principalities are opposed to worship in spirit and truth, and intentionally use "*the elementary principles of the world*" to attempt to inhibit such worship in the Church.

The astute reader may be thinking: "But many of the Jewish customs and traditions of the Jewish culture were rooted in the Mosaic Law which was given by God." That is true. But God later made that Law "obsolete",

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<sup>282</sup> That is, generally speaking, Humanity is operating independent of and in rebellion to God.

<sup>283</sup> The term, "world system", refers to human society and culture which is "fallen" – i.e., operating independent of and in rebellion to God.

<sup>284</sup> John 3:3-8

<sup>285</sup> Romans 8:14; John 14:26; 16:12-13

<sup>286</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:2-3

replacing it with a New Covenant.<sup>287</sup> A primary point I have desired to make in these articles is this: To insist on continuing in that which God has discontinued, is both grievous to the Holy Spirit and inhibiting to the purpose of God and people of God. After God has rendered that law "obsolete", and people, being deceived by spiritual powers, continue to worship under the shadow of the Old Covenant instead of the New Covenant, the result is that they remain "in bondage to the elementary principles of the world"<sup>288</sup> and fall short of "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus"<sup>289</sup>. As the apostle Paul has done in his epistles, what I have said here implies a direct connection between "the law" and "the elementary principles of the world".<sup>290</sup>

The following is an excerpt from my article, *A Colony of Heaven*:<sup>291</sup>

“The ethnic issue in the first-century church largely revolved around Jew and Gentile relations within the local congregations.<sup>292</sup> The ways in which the Holy Spirit led the apostles to address these situations give biblical principles for all inter-ethnic relations in the Body of Christ – namely,

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<sup>287</sup> Hebrews 8:13

<sup>288</sup> Galatians 2:4; 4:3, 8-9; Cf. Colossians 2:8, 20 (ESV)

<sup>289</sup> Romans 8:2

<sup>290</sup> Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20

<sup>291</sup> I would encourage you to read the entire article. You can receive a complimentary copy by simply writing to me at: [AtChristTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristTable@gmail.com)

<sup>292</sup> e.g., “The synagogue of the Freedmen in Acts 6:9 contained all those who had been freed from slavery, regardless of whether they were Jews, proselytes, or devout Gentiles. Likewise, with the Cyrenians, the Alexandrians, and the Cilicians and Asians.” (Acts 13:5, 14:1, 17:1, 10 & 17, 18:4 & 19, and 19:8) Roger Greenway, Ed., *Discipling the City: Theological Reflections on Urban Ministry*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979) p. 154.

a framework which is, in reality, Christo-centric rather than ethno-centric.”

I think we see this issue (and many others) addressed by the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:3.

“... for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh....”<sup>293</sup>

If we look at this verse in the context of Paul’s epistle, and consider what Greek scholar, W.E. Vine, has to offer, this verse could very well be translated like this:

*“... those truly consecrated to God<sup>294</sup>, who serve and minister<sup>295</sup> in the Spirit of God and take pride in and boast in<sup>296</sup> Christ Jesus and are not persuaded by nor have confidence in<sup>297</sup> nationalities<sup>298</sup>”.*<sup>299</sup>

Normally, we (myself included) have understood “confidence in the flesh” to mean “confidence in our own human efforts and abilities”. I think this is a legitimate interpretation and is part of what Paul is saying.<sup>300</sup> But if we look at the context – the next 2 verses<sup>301</sup> - we see that he is specifically and definitely referring to the possibility of his being persuaded by and putting confidence in his ethnic roots and national background. Let’s look at his words:

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<sup>293</sup> NASB

<sup>294</sup> Greek: *peritome*, Strong’s # 4061

<sup>295</sup> Greek: *latreuo*, Strong’s # 3000

<sup>296</sup> Greek: *kaucamai*, Strong’s # 2744

<sup>297</sup> Greek: *peiyo*, Strong’s # 3982

<sup>298</sup> Greek: *sarx*, Strong’s # 4561 Note contextual reference to nationality: Philippians 3:4-6

<sup>299</sup> W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*

<sup>300</sup> v. 5b-6, 9

<sup>301</sup> Philippians 3:4-5

*“... although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee....”*

He told the Philippians that *“these things he had counted loss”* (in some real sense of the word) **in order to “gain and know” Christ<sup>302</sup>** - he had to make a choice between the two – he could not swear allegiance to both. Paul also told the Colossians that he had to *“lose”* his **ethnic/national distinctives in order to truly and completely “put on” Christ; so that “Christ is all”.**<sup>303</sup> He wrote essentially the same things to the Romans<sup>304</sup> and the Galatians.<sup>305</sup> If we take Paul, the “apostle to the Gentiles (nations)”, as our ministry model, we should endeavor to *“become all things to all people”*<sup>306</sup>. But we must also bear in mind that Paul’s was a **Christo-centric ministry, which came across as “foolishness” and a “stumbling block” to the surrounding cultures<sup>307</sup>**. Indeed, the all-embracing principle of Paul’s ministry was that which the Reformers later identified as **Sola Christo – meaning that we must not be persuaded by, have confidence in, boast in, or have pride in anything above Christ.**<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> v. 7-11

<sup>303</sup> Colossians 3:10-11

<sup>304</sup> Romans 10:12

<sup>305</sup> Galatians 3:28

<sup>306</sup> I Corinthians 9:20-22 (NRSV)

<sup>307</sup> I Corinthians 1:23

<sup>308</sup> I Corinthians 1:31. Consider Paul’s quote from the Old Testament in context: Jeremiah 9:23-26. There is a definite connection between Jeremiah’s reference to the “circumcised/uncircumcised” i.e., Jew/Gentile and the culture-bound / ethno-centric situations Paul was addressing in the churches in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Philippi, and Colossae.



Thus, neither ethnicity nor diversity is the foundation of the New Covenant Church – Christ is.<sup>309</sup> And that is precisely why Christ was and continues to be a *“stone of stumbling and a rock of offense”* to so many.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> I Corinthians 3:10-11

<sup>310</sup> Romans 9:32-33, 11:9

# Appendix – 2

## A Chronology of Paul's Ministry & Epistles<sup>311</sup>

<u>A.D. DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>	<u>SCRIPTURE</u>
33	Saul/Paul's conversion Traveled: Damascus-Arabia-Damascus	(Acts 9 -12) (Acts 9:1-25; Galatians 1:17)
36	1 <sup>st</sup> visit to Jerusalem Traveled: - Caesarea-Syria & Cicilia-Antioch	(Acts 9:26-11:29; Galatians 1:18)
46	Came to Antioch 2 <sup>nd</sup> visit to Jerusalem (Famine Visit) Returned to Antioch	(Acts 11:26-12:25)
48-Spring	1 <sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey Traveled: Antioch-Seleucia-Cyprus-Pamphylia- Galatia (Derbe)- Pamphylia-Cyprus-Selucia- Antioch of Pisidia & Antioch of Syri	(Acts 13:2-14:28)
48/49-Winter	Jerusalem church conference Returned to Antioch	(Acts 15:1-35; Galatians 2:1-14)

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<sup>311</sup> After reviewing many scholarly chronologies, I decided to construct a chronology based primarily on Dennis McCallum's "*Chronological Study of Paul's Ministry*" ([www.Xenos.org](http://www.Xenos.org)), which incorporates the Delphi Inscription dating for Gallio. The dating of Gallio helps with the dating of Paul's missionary journeys; but doesn't actually help with the dating of his epistles. All dating of Paul's epistles by all scholars are approximations. *Added to this chronology* I have super-imposed the Northern Galatia View for the dating of The Letter to the Galatians. I have also grouped Galatians, along with 2 Corinthians & Romans, with "The Prison Epistles" (viz. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians & Philemon), meaning they were written either from Caesarea or Rome, with "The Pastoral Epistles" (viz. 1 & 2 Timothy & Titus) being written sometime after Paul's release from Rome. I have also consulted Raymond E. Brown's "*Introduction to Galatians*" and John A.T. Robinson's "*Re-dating the New Testament*" for the placement of Paul's epistles.

49-Spring	2 <sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey Traveled: Antioch-Syria & Cilicia Derbe-Lystra-Phrygia & Galatia-Troas- Macedonia-Philippi-Samothrace-Neopolis- Amphipolis-Thessalonica-Berea-Athens-	(Acts 15:36-17:14)
49/50-Winter	Stayed in Corinth (for 1 1/2 years) Probably wrote 1 & 2 Thessalonians	(Acts 18:2)
<b>51-Summer</b>	Appeared before Gallio	
51-Fall	Traveled: Ephesus-Caesarea-Antioch of Syria	(Acts 18:1-22)
52-Spring	3 <sup>rd</sup> Missionary Journey Traveled: Antioch-Phrygia & Galatia- Stayed in Ephesus (for 2 yrs. 3 mos.)-	
54-Fall	Traveled: Macedonia-Greece-Corinth- Macedonia-Philippi-Troas- Assos-Mytelene-Chios-Samos-Miletus- Ephesus-Cos-Rhodes-Patara-Tyre- Ptolemais-Caesarea Possibly wrote 1 Corinthians	(Acts 18:23-21:14)
55-May/June	Arrived in Jerusalem & was Imprisoned in Caesarea (for 2 yrs.) Possibly wrote 2 Corinthians & Galatians & Romans	(Acts 24:27)
57	Boarded ship to Rome Sailed: Sidon-Myra-Fair Havens (Crete) Ship-wrecked at Malta (Stayed October-December) Sailed: Syracuse-Rhegium-Puteoli	(Acts 27:1-7)  (Acts 27:1; 28:13)
58-February	Boarded ship to Rome	
58-Spring	Arrived in Rome and imprisoned for 2 years Probably wrote Ephesians & Philippians & Colossians & Philemon	(Acts 21:15-26:32; 28:14-31)
60	Released from prison and probably traveled to Spain  Possibly wrote 1 & 2 Timothy & Titus in Greece	(1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:17; Titus 3:12)
64	Returned to Rome, was imprisoned, and martyred	(2 Timothy 4:6)

# Appendix - 3

## Destination & Date of Galatians

### The Northern and Southern Galatia Views

The dating of the Letter to the Galatians depends on the destination of the letter. There are two main views - The Northern Galatia View and The Southern Galatia View. Charles C. Ryrie summarizes this and writes: “At the time of the writing of this letter the term ‘Galatia’ was used both in a geographical and in a political sense. The former referred to north-central Asia Minor, north of the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe; the latter referred to the Roman province (organized in 25 B.C.) that included southern districts and those cities just mentioned. If the letter was written to Christians in Northern Galatia, the churches were founded on the second missionary journey and *the epistle was written on the third missionary journey*, either early from Ephesus or later from Macedonia (57 A.D.) In favor of this is the fact that Luke seems to use “Galatia” only to describe Northern Galatia. (Acts 16:6; 18:23)”

“If the letter was written to Christians in South Galatia, the churches were founded on the first missionary journey, the letter was written after the end of the journey (probably from Antioch, ca. A.D. 49, making it the earliest of Paul’s epistles), and the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) convened shortly afterward. In favor of this dating is the fact that Paul does not mention the

decision of the Jerusalem council that bore directly on his Galatian argument concerning the Judaizers, indicating that the council had not yet taken place.”

## Why I Favor the Northern Galatia View

This summary presented by Charles C. Ryrie is very concise, effectively commenting on major issues, but certainly not addressing every issue. I’ve read many articles investigating the destination and dating of the Letter to the Galatians. There are good theologians with good arguments on both sides of the debate. But for me, the letter having been sent to Northern Galatia with the later date of about 56 A.D. (or 57 A.D.) makes the most sense because:

Luke, Paul’s travel companion and the author of the Book of Acts, uses the term, “Galatia”, to mean Northern Galatia when he references it in Acts 16:6 and 18:23. This is the area Paul traveled to on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey (52 – 57 A.D.). The Letter to the Galatians was written during this journey in approximately 56 or 57 A.D. – probably in Ephesus, where Paul spent an extended period of time “off the road” teaching in the School of Tyrannus.<sup>312</sup>

In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul mentions that he had visited them two times.<sup>313</sup> These two visits are referred to in Acts 16:6 and 18:23. The Acts

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<sup>312</sup> Acts 19:1-10

<sup>313</sup> Galatians 4:13-16

16:6 visit took place after the Acts 15 church conference in Jerusalem. Paul appeared before Gallio in 51 A.D.<sup>314</sup>; and the Acts 18:23 visit took place after this – sometime between 52 and 55 A.D. Therefore, the writing of Galatians would have to had been after the church conference in Jerusalem in 48 A.D. and after these two visits to Galatia, making the writing date 55 or 56 A.D.

Those who favor the Southern Galatia view conclude that the Letter to the Galatians was written directly after Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> missionary journey to Southern Galatia, and therefore has an earlier dating – that is, before the church conference in Jerusalem in Acts 15, because “Paul does not mention the decision of the Jerusalem council that bore directly on his Galatian argument concerning the Judaizers, (which) indicates that the council had not yet taken place”.<sup>315</sup> This is a logical assumption, but still only an assumption. It is not based on historical fact recorded in scripture. The fact that Paul does not mention the decision of James in his Letter to the Galatians makes perfect sense to me:

I do not find it problematic that Paul would not mention the proclamation made by James at the church conference: James is the person who sent “*certain men from James*” to Antioch to harass Paul regarding the Law. In his

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<sup>314</sup> This is the most accurately known date in the life of the apostle Paul; and is used as a fixed point for chronologies of his life and travels. An inscription found in the Temple of Apollo in Delphi in Central Greece has enabled scholars to date the beginning of Gallio's term as proconsul to July 1, 51 A.D. (Gallio was born I 5 B.C. and died in 65 A.D.) *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

<sup>315</sup> This quote from Charles Ryrie also represents the perspective of other commentators.

letter to the Galatians, whereas some assume it would be a “natural” thing for Paul to appeal to the authority of the apostles in Jerusalem, I think more likely that Paul would be reluctant to appeal to the authority of the apostles in Jerusalem. In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul is making a case that his authority was based on the encounter and the revelation he received personally from the risen Christ, not on any recognition or association he had with the Jerusalem apostles.<sup>316</sup> Paul clearly made a point of saying that the “*reputation*” and “*authority*” of the apostles in Jerusalem “*made no difference*” to him.<sup>317</sup> Even though Paul agreed with the decision, that proclamation was attributed to the authority of James, not to Paul. So, it seems very likely to me that he intentionally would not mention the proclamation of James at the church conference in Jerusalem.

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<sup>316</sup> Galatians 1:10-12

<sup>317</sup> Galatians 2:6-9

# 6. “Elementary Principles of the World”

## Introduction

As I've stated in a previous article, *“the elementary principles of the world”* have been used as tools by the fallen powers and principalities (2 *Corinthians 10:5; Ephesians 6:12*) to keep the Church – namely, the first century Church, and almost all the various streams of the Church throughout its history, even to the present day Church (including “organic” “home churches”) – under the shadow of the Old Covenant with regards to its worship praxes, and falling short of fulfilling its calling to gather and function as the Ecclesia of the Kingdom of God. **In short, through “the elementary principles of the world”, the powers and principalities have deceived the Church to continue gathering for sacralized activities not in accord with “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:2; 2 Corinthians 3:6) rather than gathering to discuss and implement the affairs of the Kingdom of God.**

To be clear, it is not the particular “worship” activities themselves which are problematic, it is the **“sacralization”** of those activities – namely, prescribing them as being “normative”, separating them, setting them apart, into specified, humanly organized, and programmed activities – all of which violates the essence of the New Covenant by:



- ignoring the Holy Spirit
- promoting a ministry “of the letter” rather than “of the Spirit”
- keeping Christians serving under the shadow of the Old Covenant
- and keeping gatherings of the Church (Ecclesia) preoccupied with ritual routine rather than the affairs of the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, this particular article will be an investigation into the nature of *“the elementary principles of the world”* (*ta stoicheia tou kosmou*) – a phrase penned by Paul, the apostle. We will look into the meaning of the Greek word, *stoicheia*; review the passages of scriptures in which Paul uses the term *“elementary principles of the world”*; reference the major interpretations of the term; state what seems to be the most consistently accurate meaning of the term; and discuss the sacralization of Christianity which has given rise to the various manifestations these *“elementary principles of the world”* in the worship of the Church throughout its history and into the present.

## Galatians 4:1-11

*1“Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, 2but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. 3So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. 4But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba!*

Father!" 7Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. 8However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. 9But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? 10You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain."

## Colossians 2:8-23

8"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. 9For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; 11and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. 16Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— 17things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. 20If you have died

*with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.”*

# “The Elementary Principles of the World”

## “Of the World”

The Greek word, “*stroicheia*” has been translated using various English words such as “elementary principles” (NASB), “basic principles” (NKJV), “rudiments” (KJV), “elemental spirits” (EVS & NRSV), “elemental forces” (HCSB), “elemental spiritual forces” (NIV), et al. Personally, I prefer the term “elementary principles”. But before we delve into exactly what these “principles” are, it would be beneficial to take note of their context, or better, their nature: Namely, they are “of the world”, not of the Holy Spirit, but “of the world”. Jesus specified that the world is evil by nature, and therefore the world hates Him and His disciples.<sup>318</sup> He also noted that the world is beset with spiritual snares for God’s children.<sup>319</sup> The apostle James explains that the world is a hostile enemy of God<sup>320</sup>; and that the “wisdom” it offers is “earthly, natural and demonic”.<sup>321</sup> The apostle Paul teaches that *“the course of this world operates according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience”*<sup>322</sup>; and that **through these**

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<sup>318</sup> John 7:7

<sup>319</sup> Matthew 18:7. Greek: *skandalon*, Strong’s # 4625, scandal, offense, stumbling block

<sup>320</sup> James 4:4

<sup>321</sup> James 3:15

<sup>322</sup> Ephesians 2:2

***“elementary principles”*** the world holds people in bondage<sup>323</sup>; therefore we ***“wrestle”***<sup>324</sup> and are at ***“war”***<sup>325</sup> with these things.<sup>326</sup>

To correctly understand the apostolic perspective, particularly Paul’s, one must be aware that there are **“tools”** employed by powers and principalities **“behind”** the idea and practice of **“sacred”** times, places, and things. These are the spiritual forces which Paul identified as adversaries in apostolic warfare. In 2 Corinthians 10:5, he refers to them as *“speculations”* (NASB) or *“imagination”* (KJV)<sup>327</sup> and *“proud obstacles”* (RSV) or *“pretensions”* (NIV)<sup>328</sup>. It bears repeating: **These are “tools” employed by powers and principalities “behind” the idea and practice of “sacred” times, places, and things.** Of course, it is quite likely the reader is hesitant to accept that as being true. It is the purpose of this article to demonstrate the veracity of this statement.

**Again, I am proposing that *“the elementary principles of the world”* are “tools’ used by the *“principalities”, “powers”, “world-forces of darkness”, and “spiritual forces of wickedness”* referred to in Ephesians 6:12.**

Perhaps by their association with these entities we can learn a little more

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<sup>323</sup> Galatians 4:3

<sup>324</sup> Cf. Ephesians 6:12, Greek: *palle*, Strong’s # 3823

<sup>325</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, Greek: *strateuomai*, Strong’s # 4754

<sup>326</sup> Ephesians 6:12; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

<sup>327</sup> Greek: *logismos*, Strong’s # 3053.

<sup>328</sup> Greek: *hupsoma*, Strong’s # 5313.

about the nature of these "*elementary principles*". So, let's take a closer look at:

- "*principalities*": The Greek word translated "*principalities*" is *arche*<sup>329</sup>, meaning "the first in command" in the world system.
- "*powers*": The Greek word translated as "*powers*" is *exousia*<sup>330</sup>, meaning "controlling forces" or "forces of control".
- "*the world-forces of this darkness*": The Greek word translated "*world-forces*" is *kosmo-krator*<sup>331</sup>. This is the only mention of it in the New Testament. It means the "mighty ones" or "strong ones" in the world system.
- "*the spiritual forces of wickedness*": The Greek word translated "*wickedness*" is *poneria*<sup>332</sup>, meaning the "iniquity" or "depravity" inherent in the world system.

Various theological works have attempted to identify exactly what the apostle Paul was referring to when he wrote of the "powers". The various views run the gamut of interpreting these "powers" to be solely spiritual, to "demythologizing" them to be solely human. I personally hold a median view and understand these "powers" to be spiritual entities which influence and work through human entities – specifically the ideologies and cultures of the world, including the political leaders and governments of the nations,

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<sup>329</sup> Strong's # 746

<sup>330</sup> Strong's # 1849

<sup>331</sup> Strong's # 2888

<sup>332</sup> Strong's # 4189

as well as religious leaders and organizations. Colossians 1:16 illustrates this view by explicitly combining the categories of “in the heavens” and “on the earth” and “visible” and “invisible”.<sup>333</sup>

Another aspect we must consider regarding “*the elementary principles of the world*” is that they are **“sinful”** (even though they may pose as religious). They are related to the sin principle in the world. The apostle Paul wrote of the principle of sin or “law of sin and death” entering the world.<sup>334</sup> Being “sinful”, by definition, **they “fall short of the glory of God”.**<sup>335</sup>

David Smith of South Africa<sup>336</sup>, offers the following insights:

“The earth was without form ....”<sup>337</sup> In the original creation, God gave the earth His heavenly organization. When Humanity fell, Satan replaced this with his counterfeit organization by which the world now operates. The apostle John gives us an analysis of the world which seems to coincide with what Satan offered to Eve in the garden: What seemed “good for food” equates to “the lust of the flesh”. What was “pleasant to the eyes” equates to “the lust of the eyes”. And what promised “to make one wise” equates with “the pride of life”.<sup>338</sup> In any case, **the organization of the world system**

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<sup>333</sup> This view is widely held by many others including Marva Dawn, Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, William Stringfellow, and Robert E. Webber. On this subject, I highly recommend the writings of Michael S. Heiser, specifically *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*. Chapter 37, “This Means War”, deals with some of these very terms.

<sup>334</sup> Romans 5:12, 8:2

<sup>335</sup> Romans 6:23

<sup>336</sup> David Smith, Howick, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, [davendale001@gmail.com](mailto:davendale001@gmail.com)

<sup>337</sup> Genesis 1:2

<sup>338</sup> 1 John 2:15-17 / Genesis 3:6

“the elementary principles of the world”) is diametrically opposed to the organism of the Holy Spirit.”

## Stoicheia

The Greek word, *stroicheia*<sup>339</sup>, means "any first thing, from which the others, belonging to some series or composite whole, take their rise; an element, a first principle".<sup>340</sup> It can refer to both material and non-material things. In 2 Peter 3:10 & 12, it clearly refers to the material elements of the universe. In Hebrews 5:12-13 and 6:1-2, the writer is referring to basic or elementary religious teachings. This is more akin to the usage Paul makes of the term in his letters to the Galatians and Colossians, which are the scripture passages we are dealing with in this article.

*Thayer's Greek Lexicon* states that these “*elementary principles*” are “the elements, rudiments, primary and fundamental principles of any art, science, or discipline.” Thayer goes on to say: “In the N. T. we have (in Hebrews 5:12 & 13) the rudiments with which mankind were indoctrinated before the time of Christ, i. e., the elements of religions training, or the ceremonial precepts common alike to the worship of Jews and of Gentiles, (and) Galatians 4:3 & 9, specifically, the ceremonial requirements especially

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<sup>339</sup> Plural of *stroicheion* - Strong's # 4747.

<sup>340</sup> Thayer's Greek Lexicon



of Jewish tradition, minutely set forth by theosophists and false teachers, and fortified by specious argument (Colossians 2: 8 & 20).<sup>341</sup>

## Defining “*The Elementary Principles of the World*”

Reviewing the major commentaries, one encounters three classical interpretations of “*the elementary principles of the world*”:

*The Law of Israel*<sup>342</sup>...

The strength of this view is that it stresses the fact that Paul connects being “*under the law*”<sup>343</sup> with being “*under the elementary principles of the world*”.<sup>344</sup> It also stresses the fact that the false teachers Paul refers to are prescribing Old Covenant laws.<sup>345</sup>

The weakness of this view is that Paul also uses the term “*elementary principles of the world*” in reference to false teaching from non-Jewish sources as well.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> This view is held by J.B. Lightfoot, John Stott, and Merrill C. Tenney.

<sup>343</sup> Galatians 3:23 & 4:5

<sup>344</sup> Galatians 4:3

<sup>345</sup> Galatians 4:10; Colossians 2:16 & 21

<sup>346</sup> Colossians 2:8; Cf. Galatians 4:8-9

## *Spirit Beings which Govern the Planets*<sup>347</sup>...

Support for this view comes mainly from extra-biblical literature citing astral deities associated with various heavenly bodies, the movements of which supposedly affect humanity's life on earth.<sup>348</sup> Paul speaks of the "*worship of angels*" and of "*beings that by nature are not gods*" and associates these with "*the elementary principles of the world*".<sup>349</sup> Associating "*the elementary principles of the world*" with spirit beings is not the same as saying they **ARE** spirit beings. In fact, I believe the "principles" are tools of spirit beings, but not the beings themselves.

One weakness of this view is that it is most difficult to imagine that the Judaizers were advocating the worship of these spirit beings and astrological observances as part of the Law of Israel.<sup>350</sup> And, the dietary and calendar injunctions in Colossians 2:16 and Galatians 4:10 are obviously based in Old Covenant ritual and not in pagan Greek practices. Also: George E. Ladd states that the word, *stroicheia*, was not associated with astral deities until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century;<sup>351</sup> and Gerhard Delling claims that the

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<sup>347</sup> This view is held by James Boice, F.F. Bruce, and Donald Guthrie, among others.

<sup>348</sup> Thayer's Greek Lexicon, Strong's # 4747: "#3. the heavenly bodies, either as parts of the heavens, or (as others think) because in them the elements of man's life and destiny were supposed to reside.... Hence, some interpreters infelicitously understand Paul's phrase *τάστοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου*, Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20, of the heavenly bodies, because times and seasons, and so sacred seasons, were regulated by the course of the sun and moon; yet in unfolding the meaning of the passage on the basis of this sense they differ widely."

<sup>349</sup> Colossians 2:18; Galatians 4:8-9.

<sup>350</sup> Cf. Exodus 20:3-5

<sup>351</sup> George E. Ladd, "A Theology of the New Testament", p. 402.

term, *stroicheia*, was not used to refer to spirit beings until the 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>352</sup> – centuries after Paul wrote Galatians and Colossians.

### *Religious Principles*<sup>353</sup>

According to this view, *“the elementary principles of the world”* refer to **religious principles before Christ and apart from Christ**. Paul places ALL other religions - including Old Covenant Judaism - in a negative category compared to The Way in Christ. To turn away from Christ and return to Old Covenant Judaism, as the Galatians, Hebrews and others were tempted to do, was to place oneself in the shadow of a “weak and worthless”<sup>354</sup> spiritual system similar in some way to pagan religions and philosophies.

This view allows for the Jewish meaning of the prescriptions in Galatians 4:10 and Colossians 2:16 & 21. And, it explains why Paul can refer to the Law of Israel as *“weak and worthless.”*<sup>355</sup> Paul can speak negatively about the Law of Israel even though it was originated by God, because God meant the Law of Israel to be only a shadow of Christ.<sup>356</sup> And, now that Christ has come, it is a *“weak and worthless”* system which leads to bondage<sup>357</sup>, and therefore He has made it obsolete and abolished it.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Gerhard Friedrich, Editor, “Theological Dictionary of the New Testament”, Volume 7, pp. 682-683.

<sup>353</sup> This view is held by Colin Brown, Gerhard Dellling, George E. Ladd, and Herman Ridderbos.

<sup>354</sup> Galatians 4:9-10

<sup>355</sup> Cf. Ephesians 2:15; Hebrews 7:18-19, 8:13.

<sup>356</sup> Colossians 2:17

<sup>357</sup> Galatians 3:22-23, 4:9

<sup>358</sup> Hebrews 7:18-19, 8:13; Ephesians 2:15

This view also explains why Paul can link the Law of Israel with the various pagan religions and philosophies into the one category of “*elementary principles of the world*”. To receive the Spirit of God, become a son and an heir of God, to know and be known by God in an intimate relationship,<sup>359</sup> only to return to some impersonal religious system, is, with regards to spiritual reality, no better than paganism; and therefore, is “of the world”, in that sense. While the Law may not be false with regards to doctrine, if one were to analyze the choice of an external religious system over the fellowship of the Spirit, one will surely find idolatry at its base. **This self-same analysis and idolatry are the subject matter of this article.**

The one thing questionable about this view is that it would have Paul designating the Old Covenant Law as “*of the world*”.<sup>360</sup> But this is not so problematic, if one understands that God’s purpose for using the Law was to foreshadow Christ. God accomplished that purpose and “moved on” to His next purpose which was to establish the New Covenant. In a manner of speaking, God “moved on” from shadow to substance. The Old Covenant rituals, customs and traditions indeed had material substance, but did not have spiritual substance or spiritual reality – that came only with Christ. These material things were “in the world” casting shadows pointing to Christ, but the spiritual reality is only in Christ.<sup>361</sup> George E. Ladd offers

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<sup>359</sup> Cf. Galatians 4:6-8; Romans 8:14-17

<sup>360</sup> Cf. Galatians 4:3-5

<sup>361</sup> On the issue of Old Covenant rituals being “of the world”, Gary DeLashmutt offers this in a footnote to his article “*Paul’s Usage of ta stroicheis tou kosmou*”: “Both Colossians 2:22 and Mark 7:18 draw attention to the

this explanation: “*World*’ is used as the whole complex of human earthly relationships, which though not evil in itself can stand between man and God.”<sup>362</sup> And that is, in fact, the point – namely, the phenomenon and tendency of humanity to put the material religious thing before the God who is Spirit. As we will discuss later in this article, this is, in fact, idolatry.

As I’ve said, the establishment of the New Covenant abolished the Old Covenant Law and made it obsolete. Therefore, to be operating under the Old Covenant Law now would be like operating under a pagan religion or philosophy of man – that is, “of the world”. All law outside of “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” operates in an outward material context, whereas the “Law of Christ” operates in an inward spiritual context. That is not a Gnostic statement. Jesus Himself said: “God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”<sup>363</sup> If one cannot embrace that statement, one cannot understand nor enter into the New Covenant – one cannot understand nor enter into Eternal Life – one cannot understand nor enter into the Kingdom of God<sup>364</sup> - nor can one understand or be part of the Church which Jesus is building. “It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh profits nothing.”<sup>365</sup> It is “a new covenant not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”<sup>366</sup> “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that

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‘this-worldliness’ temporality of the dietary laws. Colossians 2:17 implies the same ‘this-worldly’ status of the Old Testament religious calendar; it was only an earthly ‘shadow’ of the spiritual ‘substance’ of Jesus.”

<sup>362</sup> George E. Ladd, “A Theology of the New Testament”, p. 399

<sup>363</sup> John 4:24

<sup>364</sup> John 3:3-8

<sup>365</sup> John 6:63

<sup>366</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:6

*which is born of the Spirit is spirit... you must be born of the Spirit.*<sup>367</sup>

*“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”*<sup>368</sup>

*“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.”*<sup>369</sup> *“The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy IN THE HOLY SPIRIT.”*<sup>370</sup> *“(You) are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*<sup>371</sup>

Investigating all the possible interpretations of the term, “*elementary principles of the world*”, while insisting on no contradiction in interpretation between both the Colossian passage and the Galatian passage, the only sound conclusion one can come to is the one which Gary DeLashmutt puts forth, which I quote here:

**“In conclusion, the view that explains “the elementary principles of the world” as pertaining to all religion (including the Old Testament Law and especially its ritual system) before and outside of Christ is the most tenable position.”**

“Paul’s usage of “the elementary principles of the world” obviously warns against syncretism of the gospel with any other human philosophic or religious system. This is the application most commonly pursued by preachers and expositors today. But another important application of this

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<sup>367</sup> John 3:6-7

<sup>368</sup> Romans 8:14

<sup>369</sup> Romans 15:50

<sup>370</sup> Romans 14:17

<sup>371</sup> 1 Peter 2:5

phrase lies in the way Paul views **Old Testament ritual and the role of ritual in general.**”

### *Imposition of Old Testament Ritual*

“Clearly, these two passages warn against the imposition of Old Testament rituals on Christians. It is not just looking to those rituals as a means of justification before God that is condemned; **the observance of them as a sign "spirituality" is inappropriate for the Christian** because those rituals merely foreshadowed the "substance," or reality, which Christians now enjoy in the person and work of Jesus.... Both direct and indirect implementation of this ritual law pervades much of the church.”

### *New Testament Ritualism*

“These two passages also warn in principle against **the danger of ritualism even when the rituals involved are prescribed by the New Testament.**”

"Ritualism" is being used here in the sense of making ritual observance a primary focus of the Christian life and means of its expression. Water baptism and communion are the two rituals most often employed in such "New Testament" ritualism, although foot-washing and other practices are sometimes also included.”

“The Galatian passage in particular pits **the religion of ritual observance against the great privilege of personally relating to God through the**

agency of the Holy Spirit. Ritualism was legitimate (even necessary) during the Old Testament economy because this kind of personal relationship with God was not possible. But now God has made it possible to relate to him as Abba. The work of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit have made it possible for us to be adopted into God's family. **To go back to relating to God primarily through ritual observance is to reject God's assessment of this gift.** This is spiritual regression which is reprehensible enough to make Paul fear that he had labored in vain (Galatians 4:11)! .... ritualism as the means to relating to God has been 'outgrown' and rejected. This is also the argument of the Book of Hebrews (especially chapters 7-10)."<sup>372</sup>

(End quote)

Hopefully, the direct connection between "the elementary principles of the world" and "ritualism" has been clearly established. This "ritualism" is by no means limited to that of the so-called "liturgical" churches. To the contrary, I hope to convince the reader that such "ritualism" (just one way of labeling "*the elementary principles of the world*") was operational in the "New Testament Church" of the first century, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches throughout their history, the Reformed Protestant churches throughout their history, as well as in Pentecostal, Charismatic, Evangelical, and so-called Organic and house churches of today. For evidence of the theological promotion and applied practice of "ritualism" in

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<sup>372</sup> From "Paul's Usage of ta Stoicheis tou Kosmou" by Gary DeLashmutt <https://www.xenos.org/essays/pauls-usage-ta-stoicheia-tou-kosmou> I highly recommend a reading of this paper. It is the most complete treatment and sound interpretation of Paul's meaning of "the elementary principles of the world" I have come across.



the churches of our day I refer you to the writings of Robert E. Webber<sup>373</sup>, Thomas Howard<sup>374</sup> and Mark Galli<sup>375</sup>, along with a number of important articles which were published in opposition to this negative spiritual phenomenon.<sup>376</sup>

## A Review

I think it would be helpful at this point to review what we have discussed thus far:

### *“The Powers”*<sup>377</sup>

As I stated previously, scholars hold various views with regards to the identification of **“the powers”**. Some see them as impersonal systemic forces for good or evil existing in the realm of human society yet having a kind of spiritual existence given to them by fallen humanity - not beings, per se, but in some way, socio-politico-economic forces. Others, like myself, understand them to be distinct spiritual beings over human society, fallen from their original estate of serving the purpose of God, now both

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<sup>373</sup> “Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals are Attracted to the Liturgical Church”, “Common Roots”, as well as the whole of his “Ancient-Future” series of books.

<sup>374</sup> “Evangelical Is Not Enough: Worship of God in Liturgy and Sacrament”.

<sup>375</sup> “Beyond Bells and Smells”, and “Ancient-Future People”, an article in *Christianity Today* (February 2008).

<sup>376</sup> “Ancient-Future Heresies” by T.A. McMahon, *The Berean Call* (February 28, 2008); “Why We Should be Wary of Adding Extrabiblical Rituals to our Worship” by Philippe Sterling, originally published as “Return to Ritual, Part 2”, *Grace in Focus* (Jan/Feb 2010); “From Ritualism to a Personal Relationship with God” by Gary DeLashmutt ([www.Xenos.org](http://www.Xenos.org))

<sup>377</sup> It is not the purpose of this article to fully discuss the definition of “powers and principalities” – I have done that in another article entitled, *The Cross & The Powers of Darkness*. A complimentary copy in .PDF format can be obtained by emailing: [AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com)

adversarial towards God and oppressive towards humanity – spiritual beings and forces at work in and through human socio-politico-economic systems. *“The elementary principles of the world”* are unquestionably related to the powers and principalities but are not one and the same. My view is that *“the elementary principles of the world”* are the “tools” of the powers and principalities.

### *A Working Definition*

I have offered two definitions of *“the elementary principles of the world”*: A scriptural definition: “strongholds (consisting of) sophisticated arguments and exalted opinions raised up in disobedience against the true knowledge of God”<sup>378</sup>; and a working definition: *“The elementary principles of the world”* are religious principles apart from or outside of Christ.<sup>379</sup>

It is not in the scope of this article to discuss the operation of *“the elementary principles of the world”* in the socio-politico-economic realm. I am specifically dealing with the manifestation of these *“elementary principles of the world”* in the worship practices of the professing church. Having said that, the interconnection between the two spheres cannot be denied, because,

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<sup>378</sup> This is my translation of 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 drawn from James Strong’s *Dictionary of Greek Words*. The Greek word, *logismos* (Strong’s # 3053), can also be translated “imagination”; but “reasonings” would be more accurate. Both are figurative. The more literal translation of the word would be “computations”, as the root word, *logizomai* (Strong’s # 3049), means “to take an account of” or “to take an inventory of”.

<sup>379</sup> My phrase, “apart from or outside of Christ” will probably need more detailed definition in each given instance, but it will always mean that which not in accord with the New Covenant and therefore detracts from or undermines authentic Christ-centeredness and *preeminence*. Colossians 1:18.

whether in society at large or in the professing church, the common origin of these “*elementary principles*” is the same – namely, the world. But with regards to their manifestations in the professing church, when employed in worship practices, there is an inevitable tendency to make the observance of these external praxes<sup>380</sup> the means of expressing spirituality and they become the primary focus of the Christian life.

I also think it would be beneficial at this point to again clarify what I mean when I use the term, “**humanly organized**”: I am referring to various ways we human beings attempt to organize the Body of Christ and its life of worship. The means employed to “humanly organize” the Body of Christ and its life of worship I purport are scripturally identified as “*the elementary principles of the world*”.<sup>381</sup> Notwithstanding, the Ecclesia - the Church, which is His Body is “**heavenly organized**”, or “**Holy Spirit organized**” – namely, the Holy Spirit’s organization of the spiritual organism, the Body of Christ, and its life of worship.

Next we will discuss *Sacralization of the Spiritual* which involves Objectification (Formalism) and Sacramentalism (Symbolism). And I would caution those who do not identify with “The Liturgy” and “Order of Service” styles of worship – namely, those in Protestant, Pentecostal, Charismatic,

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<sup>380</sup> i.e., customs, traditions, methods, procedures, routines, rituals.

<sup>381</sup> Galatians 4:3, 9-10 & Colossians 2:8, 20-21

House, or Organic churches: DO NOT ASSUME WHAT IS BEING SAID  
DOES NOT APPLY TO YOU.

# Sacralization of the Spiritual

## Objectification

I have spoken of “*the elementary principles of the world*” in terms of “ritualism”.

There are other terms we can discuss which may help us to understand these spiritual phenomena more fully. One such term is “sacralization”.

**“Sacralization” in religion is attributing a sacred quality and character to certain people, places, and things. In reference to our present subject matter, I will define “sacralization” a little more specifically in this way: The setting apart, dedicating and consecrating of places, times, and activities by separating them from the believer’s everyday life and placing them in a special religious category.**

A related term is “objectification”.<sup>382</sup> Dennis McCallum has written an interesting anthropological study entitled “*The Objectification of Religion*”.<sup>383</sup> His opening statements are pertinent to our discussion: “‘Objectification’ is the religious tendency to reduce abstract principles to tangible, visceral objects, and rituals. This tendency, found in all religious complexes, has also been prominent in Christianity, despite explicit prohibitions in the New Testament.”

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<sup>382</sup> In my understanding, the two terms “sacralization” and “objectification” are essentially synonymous.

<sup>383</sup> [www.Xenos.org](http://www.Xenos.org)

The author (Dennis McCallum) believes objectification (also known as ‘formalism’) remains to be one of the greatest stumbling blocks to people considering Christianity today. He also writes: “The student of history of religion must wonder why this is such a universal tendency. Any phenomenon that appears everywhere on earth, during every period of history, and in every known religious complex, must have some underlying explanations that are fairly common or general.”<sup>384</sup> The “underlying explanation” I would offer is this: *“the elementary principles of the world”*.

McCallum’s article is an excellent overview of various studies and theories in the fields of Anthropology and Comparative Religion to which he adds his own Christian perspective. I agree with him when he suggest that the concept of “sacred space”, while only one example, is representative of other aspects of the objectification of religion. And I believe that what he says about “sacred space” can be accurately applied to the sacralization of other aspects like times, and activities: “‘Sacred space’ refers to the universal tendency of religious man to identify space that is sacred, and to carefully delimit that space from profane space. This space, once marked off, usually also plays a key role in the ongoing worship and religious practice of the faithful in that system.”<sup>385</sup> Later in the article, he states: “There is absolutely no provision in the New Testament Era (which I take to have begun at Pentecost) for any form of sacred space<sup>386</sup>.... Likewise, there

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.; Cf. Acts 7:48-50; Hebrews 8:13, 13:10-14.

is no claim made in the area of sacred time, or religious calendar.”<sup>387</sup> In other words, there is no provision in the New Testament Era for “the elementary principles of the world” sacralizing places, times, and activities.

While I think that there is much in the New Testament scriptures which McCallum does not take the opportunity to include in his article regarding Christianity and objectification, I do totally agree with his stated conclusion: “I find myself unable to avoid the conclusion that humankind’s craving for control and regularization of the sacred has played a major role in the objectification of religion.”<sup>388</sup> And as McCallum points out, anthropologist, Edward Norbeck, speaking from an entirely secular perspective astutely discerns: “... religious acts tend to become goals in themselves. Histories of religions provide many examples of rituals rendered meaningless by passage of time, but which are nevertheless tenaciously retained. Empty of their original significance, the rites themselves have become goals which the members of society are under compulsion to reach by faithful performance.”<sup>389</sup> I have underlined the idea that religious rites become goals, because THAT is the insidious thing about it – the “shadow” is taken to be the “substance”.<sup>390</sup> “Objectivism” is certainly another term

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid.; Cf. Colossians 2:16-17 and Galatians 4:9-10.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Edward Norbeck, “Religion in Primitive Society”, p. 74

<sup>390</sup> I will take this opportunity to say I do not think there is anything essentially “wrong” with religious rites. In fact, in and of themselves, I think they should be placed in the category of “Art” rather than “Worship”. If viewed as such, I believe Christian artists would be encouraged to create in all the various art forms with much more freedom, breadth, depth. The Church could be freed to act as a “patron” of the arts as in times past, and

which can be used to label what the scriptures refer to as “the elementary principles of the world”.

## Sacramentalism

“Sacramentalism” in theology is the belief that the performance of certain external rites confers the grace of God. A “sacrament” has been defined as “an outward physical sign of an inward spiritual grace”. An integral part of sacramentalism is “symbolism” - that is, the use of religious symbols or icons to identify particular religious concepts. Symbols and sacraments have obviously played a major role in all religions, including orthodox Judaism and conventional Christianity. The efficacy of symbols and sacraments to produce creative, imaginative, artistic, even spiritual inspiration has proven itself for many centuries. And there has been much written on the nature and benefits of symbol and sacrament.<sup>391</sup> Yet, there have also been significant writings on the corruption of Christianity specifically through the incorporation of symbol and sacrament in worship practices.<sup>392</sup> The problem with using external physical things to represent internal spiritual things is this: As was already stated above, the physical thing, rather than the spiritual thing, becomes the focus; and the rite

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the arts could be a viable witness of the Kingdom of Heaven in the world. I have written about these things in other articles entitled *A Call to God-centered Art* and *Art & True Spirituality*. Complimentary copies of these articles can be obtained by emailing [AtChristsTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristsTable@gmail.com)

<sup>391</sup> Just one example is “Evangelical Is Not Enough” by Thomas Howard; but also, the many writings of Robert E. Webber.

<sup>392</sup> Fine examples are “The Reformers and Their Stepchildren” by Leonard Verduin, especially Chapter 4: “Sacramentschwärmer!”; and “Humiliation of the Word” by Jacques Ellul.



becomes the substitute for the reality. Again, an explanation of this religious phenomenon is that the external physical things are but a mere “shadow” – a representation of spiritual things - drawn from and based upon human understanding. This is mistaken for spiritual reality. But **true spirituality is drawn from and based upon the Person of Christ alone.** Authentic spiritual reality or substance belongs only to Christ – that is, “is derived from Christ, and can be realized only through union with Him.”<sup>393</sup> This reality is prerequisite to worship in spirit and truth. As Jesus made clear: *“God is spirit, and those who worship Him MUST worship in spirit and truth.”*<sup>394</sup> Again, like “ritualism” and “objectification”, “sacramentalism” and “symbolism” are other labels which can be used to identify what the scripture refers to as “the elementary principles of the world”.

## The Sacralization of Christianity

“Sacralization” in religion is attributing a sacred quality and character to certain people, places, and things. And more specifically for our subject matter here: The setting apart, dedicating and consecrating of places, times, and activities by separating them from the believer’s everyday life and placing them in a special religious category.

During Old Covenant times, God assigned the Hebrew prophets to prophesy to His people in an effort to desacralize, in the hearts and minds of

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<sup>393</sup> Vincent’s Word Studies

<sup>394</sup> John 4:24

the Hebrew people, the religions of Canaan, Assyria, and other pagan nations. Yet, as we know, the Hebrew people continually succumbed to the influences of pagan idolatry. Likewise, the early Christians continued in many of the Jewish rituals and regulations of the Old Covenant even after the New Covenant was established by Christ's death and resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.<sup>395</sup>

During apostolic times, the Greek and Roman pantheon of gods were also associated with natural objects, carried associated rites and regulations, and there were guilds which were formed in the name of these deities to celebrate these rites and enforce these regulations. But the early Christians did generally manage to separate themselves from this particular pagan idolatry. Yet, we must consider the fact that the apostle Paul felt it necessary to warn Christians against these pagan rites and regulations when he wrote to the Colossians:

*<sup>15</sup> "He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through it (i.e., the cross). <sup>16</sup> Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— <sup>17</sup> things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. <sup>18</sup> Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, <sup>19</sup> and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is*

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<sup>395</sup> See: Old Covenant Undertow in the Early Church and "Led by the Spirit". For complimentary .PDF copies, email: [AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com)

*from God.* <sup>20</sup> *If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,* <sup>21</sup> *“Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!”* <sup>22</sup> *(which all refer to things destined to perish with use) — in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?* <sup>23</sup> *These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.”*<sup>396</sup>

Do you see that Paul refers to these *“elementary principles of the world”* – these various special activities, separated to special times and places, and structured with rites and regulations - as **"shadows"** and not the reality of Christ. He is exhorting Christians to stop this Old Covenant approach to worship, and to embrace God's New Covenant alternative instead. And that is: *“Holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.”*

But, unfortunately, Paul's words were not sufficiently heeded – not during the first century, nor in subsequent times. What, in fact, transpired throughout the history of Christendom – through the “Patristic” period, further developments of the Catholic and Greek Orthodox ritual and liturgy, and on into Protestant sacramentalism - was a RE-SACRALIZATION of that which the New Covenant had de-sacralized.

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<sup>396</sup> Colossians 2:15-23, Cf. 8.

This sacralization in religion – this ritualism, objectification, sacramentalism, and symbolism – obviously has been extremely pervasive. But how are we to explain its pervasiveness? Is it something in human nature? I believe so.

But I believe it also goes beyond the human dimension. In his book, *"Subversion of Christianity"*, Jacques Ellul spends seven chapters explaining that Christianity has become something **TOTALLY DIFFERENT IN EVERY ASPECT** from the revelation of God in Christ. He then gives his explanation of **WHY** this could possibly happen given in light of the establishment of the New Covenant and the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. His explanation is: human aggrandizement – that is, the deliberate ignoring of the Spirit of God in favor of glorifying the human self. **BUT**, having concluded this he then also offers in chapter 9, **"Dominions and Powers"**, to further explain the incredible power of this corrupting force.<sup>397</sup>

It is my assertion that Powers and Principalities are intentionally at work in and through fallen humanity's tendencies in an effort to hinder the purpose of God. And their tools, "the elemental principles of the world",<sup>398</sup> are those which the apostle Paul also referred to as "strongholds (consisting of) sophisticated arguments and exalted opinions raised up in

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<sup>397</sup> Various scholars have various views with regards to the identification of "the powers". Some, like Ellul, see them as impersonal systemic forces for good or evil existing in the realm of human society, yet having a kind of spiritual existence given to them by fallen humanity - not beings, per se, but in some way, socio-politico forces. Others, like myself, understand them to be distinct spiritual beings over human society, fallen from their original estate of serving the purpose of God, now both adversarial towards God and oppressive towards humanity – spiritual beings and forces at work in and through human socio-politico systems.

<sup>398</sup> Galatians 4:1-11; Colossians 2:8-23.

disobedience against the true knowledge of God."<sup>399</sup>. So, while we have tried to gain insight into these things through discussion of various human concepts and practices like "sacralization", "ritualism", "objectification", "sacramentalism", and "symbolism", the scriptural identification of "the elementary principles of the world" is the apostle Paul's phrase: "strongholds (consisting of) sophisticated arguments and exalted opinions raised up in disobedience against the true knowledge of God."<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5.

<sup>400</sup> This is my translation of 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 drawn from James Strong's *Dictionary of Greek Words*. The Greek word, *logismos* (Strong's # 3053), can also be translated "imagination"; but "reasonings" would be more accurate. Both are figurative. The more literal translation of the word would be "computations", as the root word, *logizomai* (Strong's # 3049), means "to take an account of" or "to take an inventory of".

# Sacralization of the Secular

## Introduction

In the previous article, we discussed Sacralization - namely, what can be called the “Sacralization of the Spiritual” (and the “Sacralization of Christianity”). And we have looked at Sacralization as a concept and practice specifically with regards to worship<sup>401</sup>. But there has also been a *Sacralization of the Secular* which has led to Idolatry. And this idolatry has also invaded the professing Church.

As we view the world, one of the things we increasingly see is **the secularization of the spiritual**. The espousal of “Secular Materialism”, the majority worldview in western societies, has increasingly eliminated the spiritual from life. Also known as “Naturalism”, it is the idea that all that exists can be explained in solely physical terms and natural causes. As secularists have promoted this view, Christians have bemoaned the fact that the biblical worldview has lost ground in recent times. Secular Materialism not only created a “spiritual vacuum” by displacing the spiritual in life, but its agenda also progressed forward by placing the secular in those places where the spiritual has been displaced. Secular Materialism has made the secular the “new spiritual”. And, in so doing, it has Sacralized the Secular.

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<sup>401</sup> My working definition of “worship” is living a life of surrender and service to God.

Paul's words couldn't be more appropriate: *"Professing to be wise, they became fools.... For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator...."*<sup>402</sup> I think the most useful question we could ask about this phenomenon is this: "What is the cause of such idolatry?" The answer would be this: Fallen Humanity has a propensity for self-aggrandizement – AND - there exist "world forces of darkness" and "spiritual forces of wickedness" which exploit that propensity.

Now, we have been speaking of Fallen Humanity as society at large. What if we observe the same phenomenon within that which professes to be the household of God? How can such idolatry exist in the professing church? The answer is the same: Very many professing churches have a propensity for self-aggrandizement, and the "world forces of darkness" and "spiritual forces of wickedness"<sup>403</sup> are at work in their midst to exploit that propensity. Consequently, we see professing churches adopting some of the gods of Secular Materialism and enshrining them in the church. Some examples would be: organizational "efficiency", financial "success", numerical growth, "branding", marketing, entertainment, personality cults, et. al. Thus professing churches have joined forces with the "world forces of darkness" and "spiritual forces of wickedness" in the Sacralization of the Secular.

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<sup>402</sup> Romans 1:18-25, Cf. vv. 22 & 25.

<sup>403</sup> Ephesians 6:12

Many Christians have recognized the increasing secularization in the surrounding society and have proposed “binding the powers and principalities”. When Jesus spoke about “*binding*”, He was referring to “*forbidding what is already forbidden in heaven*”.<sup>404</sup> Christians cannot forbid what they themselves have willed to employ in their worship practices. I purposely use the word “employ”, as I dare say that much of the budget of conventional local churches literally does go to “employ” people and programs which (I hope to convince you) are “*the elementary principles of the world*”, the very tools of the powers and principalities. Again, Sacralization of the Secular has led to a form of idolatry, and the idol is namely - human organization. This same idol has invaded the professing churches.

## “Technique”

I am suggesting that the phenomena of the sacralization of both the spiritual and secular is excellently explained in the various writings of Jacques Ellul, specifically with regards to his concept of “**technique**”.<sup>405</sup> And I am proposing that Ellul’s concept of “technique” equates with “*the elementary principles of the world*”. So, to investigate Ellul’s concept of “**technique**” is

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<sup>404</sup> Matthew 16:19; 18:18. The syntax of the Greek text makes the meaning clear: “Whatever thou mayest bind upon the earth shall be having been bound in the heavens, and whatever thou mayest loose upon the earth shall be having been loosed in the heavens”. (*Young’s Literal Translation*). Amplified Bible: “Whatever you bind [forbid, declare to be improper and unlawful] on earth will have [already] been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose [permit, declare lawful] on earth will have [already] been loosed in heaven.”

<sup>405</sup> Although, he doesn’t use any of the labels I have used.



to further investigate *“the elementary principles of the world”*. And as we investigate Ellul’s concept of ‘technique’ , I believe we will see that the practice and pursuit of “**technique**” has resulted in the Secularization of the Secular and the idolatry of human organization. **The adoption of “technique” in worship practices has resulted in the Sacralization of the Secular, and thus very many professing churches have come under the trance of “the elementary principles of the world”.**

### Human Organization:

*Methodologies, Policies, Procedures, and Routines*

After much study and analysis of Church History, I have concluded that starting even in the first century, and then continuing throughout all church history, professing churches have chosen to employ human organization rather than looking to the organic life of the Holy Spirit. And in modern times this propensity for **human organization** has reached a point of what could be called an idolatrous obsession with methodologies, policies, procedures, and routines which have been adopted from the world system. Today, we not only have *“the elementary principles of the world”* at work in the professing churches through movements like “Hebrew Roots Christianity”<sup>406</sup> and the “Ancient-Future Church”,<sup>407</sup> but also through a plethora of

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<sup>406</sup> Cf. <https://hebrewroots.info>

<sup>407</sup> Cf. <http://ancientfuturechurch.org>

methodologies, policies, procedures, and routines employed in church ministry and mission.

I would like to propose further that, from a spiritual perspective, the source of these methodologies, policies, procedures, and routines are none other than “*the elementary principles of the world*”, the very tools of the powers and principalities. I am convinced that this is the major blockage in the flow of the Spirit’s life through the Body of Christ and the manifestation of the New Covenant.

## Jacques Ellul<sup>408</sup>

I believe a discussion on the basics of Jacques Ellul’s term, “**technique**”, would help to identify professing churches obsession with **human organization** - methodologies, policies, procedures, and routines. Ellul’s term, “**technique**”, is just one way of labeling this phenomenon. In his writing, Ellul did refer to the “*powers and principalities*”; but to my knowledge, he did not specifically refer to “*the elementary principles of the world*”.<sup>409</sup> Still, I believe his thoughts are an insightful peek into these things. So, I will

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<sup>408</sup> For background information of Jacques Ellul: <https://ellul.org/>

<sup>409</sup> It should be noted that Ellul’s understanding of “the powers” at some point changed from seeing them as actual spiritual entities in and of themselves to later referring to them as a more “impersonal” type of spiritual forces which were empowered, not in and of themselves, but were rather given this power by human societies and cultures. Yet, I believe that Ellul recognized sin, the fallen state of Humanity, as the root of this human condition. While, unlike Ellul, I DO understand the powers to be actual spiritual entities working in and through the world system and human organizations, I still find Ellul’s observations on “technique” insightful and worthwhile for this study.

be briefly discussing Ellul's concept of "technique" and connecting it with the "humanly structured" worship practices of professing churches.

## "The Society of Efficient Techniques"

In 1964, Ellul's seminal work was released in the USA under the title, "*The Technological Society*". The book was translated from the French, and the title was an adaptation of another title in French. Possibly a more descriptive title in English would have been, "**The Society of Efficient Techniques**". On page xxv of his book, this is how Ellul defines his term, "technique": "Technique is the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity."

The equivalent in contemporary terms might be the term, "Best Practices", which *Technopedia* defines in this way: "Agreement that standardizes the most efficient and effective way to accomplish a desired outcome. A best practice generally consists of a **technique, method, or process**. The concept implies that if an organization follows best practices, a delivered outcome with minimal problems or complications will be ensured."<sup>410</sup>

"Technique" is the standardized means for attaining predetermined results.  
It is a fascination with results which esteems "know-how" as the ultimate

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<sup>410</sup> <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/14269/best-practice> That is the goal of all human organization – to help prevent problems, and when problems do arise, to eliminate them in the most efficient way.

value. On page 79 of his book, Ellul states: “Technique has only one principle, efficient ordering.” Ellul argues that **efficiency is no longer an option, but a necessity imposed on all human activity.**

Let’s summarize the concept of “**technique**” with the phrase “**technological expertise**”. And let’s introduce another term - “**technocracy**”, which can be defined as governance by technocrats managing society according to trusted methodologies. I believe it would be accurate to say that Ellul’s term, “**technique**”, equates with the term, “**technocracy**”, as he sees “**technique**” as having a **managing, controlling, and governing character and power.**

To assume that Ellul is disparaging “**technology**” in a typically Luddite<sup>411</sup> manner, would be to largely misunderstand him and miss the essential point of what he has to offer. What Ellul means by “**technique**” is more about the **nature of “technocracy”**, that is, asking the question why society increasingly desires to have “technique” govern every area of life – health care, education, entertainment, religion, etc. The key word is “**why**”. The fact that “**technique**” does govern every area of modern life, I think, should be obvious. What is of interest – and importance – is “**why**”. My answer: **We desire to be governed by what we trust. And we will serve (i.e., worship)**<sup>412</sup> **what we trust to govern our lives.** Now, “**why**” Fallen Humanity

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<sup>411</sup> *Technopedia* gives the modern definition of a “Luddite” to be a term “used to describe a person who is afraid of using modern technology and avoids it as much as possible, commonly because it is seen as an invasion of privacy.” <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/14456/luddite>

<sup>412</sup> My working definition of “worship”, combining both Greek words, *proskueneo* and *latreia*, is: A life lived in surrender and service.

serves (worships) “technique” is fairly obvious: In the beginning, Humanity made the choice to live independently of the Creator. Being independent of God, it is therefore utterly dependent upon its own ingenuity and ability for governance. Without God, it has no other option – no other “source” in which to place its trust. Therefore, Fallen Humanity will naturally serve (worship) its own ingenuity and ability (technique). What is not so obvious is “why” professing churches have come to trust and serve (worship) “technique”.

### Vernard Eller<sup>413</sup>

Vernard Eller, an authority on Jacques Ellul, wrote a piece, entitled *“Technique or Kindly Light”* which was published by *House Church Central*.<sup>414</sup> In this piece he references Jacques Ellul and his term, “technique”, and also cites the old hymn and poem, *“Lead, Kindly Light”*<sup>415</sup>, Eller contrasts two very different approaches for the Church: either employing “technique” or following the “Kindly Light”. Eller equates “following the Kindly Light” with **being led by the Holy Spirit**, which is the essence of the New Covenant. Here are a few quotes which I think may be helpful:

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<sup>413</sup> For background information on Vernard Eller: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vernard\\_Eller](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vernard_Eller)

<sup>414</sup> <http://www.hccentral.com/eller1/technique.html>

<sup>415</sup> *Lead, Kindly Light* is a hymn with words written in 1833 by John Henry Newman as a poem entitled *“The Pillar and the Cloud”*.

“By “technique” he (Jacques Ellul) intends the pervasive modern mindset that gives primal value to the human skills of “problem-solving” - that is, our quite impressive ability in **setting goals, reducing them to manageable objectives, and then devising the most efficient steps and methods for getting things into the shape we have in mind for them.**”

“And in our day, the practice of technique-efficiency is the only ‘doing’ worth doing at all - just as ‘problem solving’ is the only ‘doing’ that has any significance at all. You haven't done anything if it doesn't show **‘results’ in terms of measurable objectives.** Ellul observes that, with us, technique has become totalitarian - that is, we take it as being **the only means for solving whatever problem we face.**”

Concerning the term **“programming”**: “(This) is perhaps the prime requisite and ultimate symbol of TECHNIQUE.”

Concerning the phrase **“congregational renewal”**: “ ... a wording as completely indigenous to technique-efficiency as it is foreign to anything the New Testament ever talks about. And from the biblical standpoint, I would argue that whatever our comprehensive strategy might produce, it could be nothing scripture would recognize as “congregational renewal.” That one either happens by the Spirit of God or it doesn't happen at all. And **the Spirit of God is perhaps the last thing in the world that will conform itself to human technique.**”

“Ellul speaks mainly of the totalitarianism of technique-efficiency in the world; my concern here is with how it has taken over the church... (as body of Christ) where human technique must be firmly prevented from displacing the primacy of God’s will and way for his people. In those things in which our call is to be faithful, it is idolatrous for us to bow down before technique-efficiency out of our love of success.”

I trust that the reader has begun to see that the “techniques” addressed by Ellul and Eller as well as the various human philosophies upon which the “techniques” are based, are present-day examples of “the elementary principles of the world” which the apostle Paul referred to in his epistles. In this article, I am discussing in considerable detail examples of “the elementary principles of the world” as they were manifested in the worship practices of the first century church. And I am making mention of the fact that, by morphing from Jewish to Christian in fashion, these religious, but worldly, practices have continued throughout all of the history of the Church into the present. I am intentionally moving slowly, attempting to build a case with care to support the argument with scriptural and historical facts. I am of the persuasion that this phenomenon has resulted in, not an unveiling, but a “re-veiling” of the New Covenant. The New Covenant was established 2000 years ago by Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. But while some Christians have appropriated this for personal salvation, by and large, the “powers and principalities” have succeeded in blinding and binding Christians as a collective in appropriating the New Covenant in worship –

that is, living a life of surrender and service according to “*the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*”.



# Worship Praxes

## Past & Present

The term, “praxes” is the plural of “praxis”. The noun *praxis* comes from the Latin and Greek words of the same spelling, based on the Greek word *prattein*, which means “to do”. Praxes are established customs and practices.<sup>416</sup> I have been labeling these praxes with terms like “sacralization”, “ritualism”, “objectification”, “sacramentalism” and “symbolism”. These terms, along with the words “customs”, “traditions”, and “rituals”, probably carry connotations which associate them with religious practices only in the past. But in this article, I hope to convince the reader that these external praxes are also present in worship practices today. And, in referring to modern-day practices, we may better refer to them using words like “methodologies”, “policies”, “procedures”, “routines”, etc. Or we may use a term coined by Jacques Ellul: “technique”.

At this point, I would like to clearly state once more my personal view of “*the elementary principles of the world*” operational in the worship practices of professing churches throughout history. There is a common view made popular by Frank Viola and George Barna in their book, “*Pagan Christianity*” proposing that the pristine praxes of the primitive Church were corrupted by various practices adopted from the pagan world at the time of Constantine. I don’t disagree that the praxes of the Church throughout its history fall short

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<sup>416</sup> <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/praxis>

of what God desires. But I do disagree with Viola and Barna's explanation – "It's all Constantine's fault."<sup>417</sup> What I believe to be somewhat more accurate is a view put forth by Wolfgang Simson in his book, *"Houses that Change the World"*:

"I trace today's Christian worship patterns back to the Jewish synagogue. The synagogue was a Jewish survival structure invented in a corrective facility called Babylon, motivated by religious and nationalistic self-preservation. It was never born out of a direct command of God that said, "Build synagogues!" The synagogue was a symbol of national defiance and rebellion against God. Prayer replaced the temple sacrifices and religious rituals became the center of Jewishness. The synagogue gave the Jewish nation a religious toy, a smokescreen that allowed them to convince themselves of their own piety, while they essentially remained disobedient to God's laws, statutes, and decrees. The liturgy in a synagogue had five elements: a call to worship, singing, reading of a portion of scripture, a sermon, blessings, and farewell. Think of it! Does this structure sound familiar? It is because this has become the pattern of "worship" in most Christian churches today. And who, other than the very enemy of God, would have an interest in installing a faulty operating system into the bones and marrows of all those that wish to follow Christ? Is it a coincidence that Christ himself mentions the "Synagogue of Satan," of those that say they are Jews, but are not, as a mysterious player in the apocalyptic scenario (Revelation 2:9 and 3:9)?"

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<sup>417</sup> For a critique of "Pagan Christianity see: <https://voice.dts.edu/review/frank-viola-pagan-christianity/>

I'd like to make two comments regarding what Simson had to say in this quote about "The Synagogue Church":

1) This specific quote is not meant to be in reference to the house churches Simson is promoting in his book – just the opposite.

2) While I agree with what Simson says in this quote, and agree with much of what he has to say in his book, as well as agree with much of what "Organic" church and "House" church spokesmen have to say, I do not agree with the perception (assumption) that the New Testament church was totally different from the synagogue: I would venture to say that Simson and almost all "Organic" church and "House" church spokesmen would say that the churches from the time of Constantine up to the present are based on the synagogue model, and we need to return to the New Testament model. I would agree with this, except that I see the synagogue model also in use in the New Testament church, particularly in the Book of Acts. Therefore, according to my perspective, the full expression of the New Covenant in and through church is not seen in the New Testament but remains yet to be expressed by the Church Jesus is building.

**IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND that fact that the apostle Paul wrote New Covenant truths in various epistles, does not mean that those truths were universal in the praxes of the primitive Church. The Book of Acts – and specifically some practices of the apostle Paul himself - testify clearly and repeatedly to the contrary.**

In a previous article<sup>418</sup>, I have discussed in detail how the first century church continued to practice Old Testament rituals, customs, and traditions, mixing these with the New Covenant. I'm referring to:

- attendance at synagogue and the temple
- keeping the Sabbath and the various Jewish feasts (sacred days and times)
- taking various vows, etc.

This was true of BOTH Jewish and Gentile Christians. There is nothing in the New Testament that clearly indicates that Peter, James, and John - or any Jewish Christians - stopped keeping the Mosaic Law in the first century.

When I read in the Didache<sup>419</sup> the rituals associated with first century baptisms and eucharist services, I see an order and tradition not unlike that of the Jewish synagogue or traditional Christian churches throughout history.<sup>420</sup> Church historians agree that Judaism and Christianity did not become completely separate entities until the time of Constantine in 312 A.D.

While it is true that around 48 A.D. (15 years after Jesus ascended) the apostles told the Gentile Christians to "*abstain from things contaminated by*

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<sup>418</sup> Old Covenant Undertow in the Early Church. For a complimentary .PDF copy, email: AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com

<sup>419</sup> An anonymous first-century treatise also known as "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles".

<sup>420</sup> I am aware of the emphasis the "Organic" and "House" church spokesmen place on 1 Corinthians 14:26 which seems to indicate the opposite and will address that in this article.

*idols*"<sup>421</sup> (concerning which Paul had a more lenient view)<sup>422</sup>, it is also true that the apostles did not discouraged them from being circumcised – that is, the apostles did not require circumcision of Gentiles, but neither did they discourage circumcision.<sup>423</sup> In fact, the apostles did not discourage the Gentiles from keeping any of the other Old Testament laws - at least, not until 56 A.D. that is, when Paul wrote his Letter to the Galatians (23 years after Jesus ascended).<sup>424</sup>

Because of his Jewish heritage,<sup>425</sup> even the apostle Paul practiced the Old Testament laws for a few decades after his conversion to Christ. This is clearly documented throughout the Book of Acts.<sup>426</sup> However, this ritualism was later clearly denounced by Paul in his epistles - particularly in Galatians and Colossians, somewhat in 2 Corinthians, Romans, and Philippians, as well as by the writer to the Hebrews. These epistles were written 23 – 25 years after Christ's ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.<sup>427</sup> In these letters, Paul most certainly did warn against these practices, but, contrary to the assertions of almost all "organic church" and "house church" spokesmen, it is merely an assumption to think that all the first century churches embraced and obeyed Paul's

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<sup>421</sup> Acts 15:20 & 29

<sup>422</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 & 10:23-30; Cf. Romans 14:1-23.

<sup>423</sup> Cf. Acts 15:19-21, 28-29

<sup>424</sup> There are two major theories on the destination and dating of Paul's Letter to the Galatians – the Southern Galatia Theory with earlier dating, and the Northern Galatia Theory with later dating. I subscribe to the latter.

<sup>425</sup> Acts 22:3 & 26:5; Philippians 3:5-6

<sup>426</sup> *Old Covenant Undertow in the Early Church*. For a complimentary .PDF copy, email:

AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com

<sup>427</sup> See *Led By the Spirit*, For a complimentary .PDF copy, email: AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com

teaching and operated totally free of the aforementioned ritualistic influence of “the elementary principles of the world”. For evidence of Old Testament worship practices continuing in the first century church, I refer you to the following articles and books:

- *When Did the Disciples of Jesus Stop Observing the Old Testament Laws and How the Apostles Were Expelled from Christianity* by Ron Ammundsen
- *Worship in the Early Church* by Sue Bracefield
- *A History of Christian Art* by Bernard Dick
- *Worship in the Early Church* by Ralph P. Martin
- *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* by Oskar Skarsaune.

Church historians verify that these practices continued on into the Patristic Period. And for the Gentile Christians, these Old Testament practices morphed into Christian rituals, customs, and traditions, including

- the addition of other “man-made” worship practices like the setting apart of Sunday as the day of gathering for “worship”
- the establishment of certain “feast days” with prescribed services, set times for prayer, nascent “orders of worship”, recitation of set prayers and hymns
- the creation of a vocabulary of Christian symbols

For evidence of this, I refer you to:

- *The Early Christians: A Sourcebook on the Witness of the Early Church* by Eberhard Arnold
- *The First Rites: Worship in the Early Church* by Kenneth Stevenson.

When we come to the Catholic and Orthodox periods, it becomes appropriate to add the label “*liturgies*” to these “man-made” *rituals, customs, and traditions*. And as church history progressed, more and different “man-made” worship practices emerged in the various Protestant traditions as well, like the concept of “sacred space”, established “Orders of Worship”, the “Common Lectionary” and the “Liturgical Calendar”, and “Sacramentalism”, et. al. It should be noted that, on the one hand, these practices reflected various aspects of a given culture at given times in history, thus being “contemporary” in their time. But on the other hand, at times there were also “retrograde movements” dedicated to recapturing and restoring the worship practices of earlier times. Very recent examples of the latter are the so-called *Ancient-Future* movement<sup>428</sup> and the *Hebrew Roots* movement<sup>429</sup>, which are both very much in vogue at the present time.

Hopefully, in this article, I have been able to make plain that a direct connection exists between “the elementary principles of the world” and these said “man-made” worship practices of the “New Testament Church”

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<sup>428</sup> Cf. <https://www.ancientfuturefaithnetwork.org>

<sup>429</sup> Cf. <https://www.gotquestions.org/Hebrew-roots.html>

– from the first century on through church history, and up through today.

For evidence of the theological promotion and applied practice of these “man-made” worship practices in the churches of our day I refer you to the writings of Robert E. Webber<sup>430</sup>, Thomas Howard<sup>431</sup> and Mark Galli<sup>432</sup>, along with a number of important articles which were published in opposition to this negative spiritual phenomenon.<sup>433</sup>

In using the adjective, “man-made”, I DO mean that these practices are of human devising. But, I also must add that I believe the inspiration, or muse if you will, of these formulations come from powers and principalities playing upon the fallen human nature. In fact, that is specifically what is being discussed in this article.

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<sup>430</sup> “Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals are Attracted to the Liturgical Church”, “Common Roots”, as well as the whole of his “Ancient-Future” series of books.

<sup>431</sup> “Evangelical Is Not Enough: Worship of God in Liturgy and Sacrament”.

<sup>432</sup> “Beyond Bells and Smells”, and “Ancient-Future People”, an article in *Christianity Today* (February 2008).

<sup>433</sup> “Ancient-Future Heresies” by T.A. McMahon, *The Berean Call* (February 28, 2008); “Why We Should be Wary of Adding Extrabiblical Rituals to our Worship” by Philippe Sterling, originally published as “Return to Ritual, Part 2”, *Grace in Focus* (Jan/Feb 2010); “From Ritualism to a Personal Relationship with God” by Gary DeLashmutt ([www.Xenos.org](http://www.Xenos.org))



# Conventional Worship Praxes

## in Light of the New Testament

### Introduction

The study of Church history affords lessons to be learned, and any knowledge and wisdom gleaned from history can benefit the contemporary church. I am of the opinion that most of the worship practices of contemporary professing churches – including most “Organic” and “House” churches - are fashioned and built according to *“the elementary principles of the world”*. The contemporary worship practices I am referring to are those separated, set apart, specified places and times and activities which we have mistakenly called “worship”:

- Separating, setting apart & specifying PLACES for “worship”
- Separating, setting apart & specifying TIMES for “worship”
- Separating, setting apart & specifying PLACES & TIMES for
  - “Gathering together on the first day of the week”
  - “A Body Ministry Meeting”
  - “The Collection”
  - “The Lord’s Supper”

Please understand that I am not saying that there is anything wrong with any of these activities, but rather our proclivity to their being separated, set apart, specified, humanly organized, and programmed. For in so doing, we

are operating according to *“the elementary principles of the world”*, ignoring the Holy Spirit; and therefore, are living under the shadow of the Old Covenant and failing to manifest the New Covenant which Jesus has already established with His death, burial, and resurrection, as well as failing to function as the Ecclesia which Jesus is building.

If clearly understood, the implications of moving beyond separated, set apart, specified places and times and humanly organized, programmed activities will be extremely radical – specifically, a laying of the axe at the root<sup>434</sup> of these worship practices. What I am indicating can be very easily misunderstood and can therefore be off-handedly rejected. So, I would like to make an appeal to the reader to find within himself or herself the desire to study the New Testament scriptures objectively for what they actually do and do not say, being willing to let go of certain cherished conventions. And on my part, I will attempt to *“make an explanation”*<sup>435</sup> for these things by considering them in light of:

- ❖ Reading the New Testament with “filters”
- ❖ Reading the New testament with Preconceptions, Presuppositions, and Assumptions
- ❖ What is “Descriptive” and what is “Prescriptive” in the New Testament scriptures
- ❖ What is “of the Letter” and what is “of the Spirit”

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<sup>434</sup> Our English word, radical, comes from the Latin word, radix, which means root.

<sup>435</sup> 1 Peter 3:15, an *apologia*, Strong’s # 627.

## Why Do We Do What We Do?

For a period of approximately 40 years, my professional occupation was attending church services. In various ways, I shared in the responsibility of planning all of those church services. And in most of those services, which took place in primarily independent non-denominational churches, I delivered the message, the music, and the ministry of praying for peoples' needs. With an average of three per week, that's about 6240 church services. Added to this are six month-long overseas mission trips to factor in a minimum of twenty meetings per trip. That's another 120 church meetings. And there was also a season of six years in which I held three part-time positions in mainline denominational churches where one of my duties was to commit to print in the "church bulletin" the "Order of Service" for "Sunday morning worship services", weddings, funerals, and other "special" services. That adds more than another 300 church services. So, let's say I'm referring to approximately 6666 church services in total. In any case, one can appreciate that, considering that level of involvement, with regards to the activities of the conventional church meeting, I would ask the question: **"Why do we do what we do?"** I remember one particular meeting in Brazil. Before being called up to teach, I sat observing the activities of the church service. As I observed, I compared what I was seeing to what I have seen reading the gospels about the ministry of Jesus. I thought to myself: "What in the world does any of this have to do with Jesus Christ?"

For many years, the recurring question would come up in my heart and mind: **“What are we supposed to be doing when we gather together?”** In considering an answer to that question, I honestly had no use for contemporary answers. To many of my friends who said: “There is no New Testament pattern in the scriptures”, my response was: “You obviously need to study the scriptures more.” To the idea that each generation just needs to contextualize their worship services to the contemporary and indigenous culture”, my response was: “We don’t need to ‘re-image’ the church, we just need to restore it to the New Testament pattern.” I obviously believed there was a New Testament pattern. I still do, but in a different sense, which I will explain later in this article.

Also, I was only marginally interested in studying the “orders of worship” and liturgies of the historical churches. As many others, I believed, and still do, that the worship practices of professing churches throughout history right up into contemporary times have strayed from the “New Testament Pattern”. Only recently have I come to see those “orders of worship” and liturgies as Old Covenant shadows. And only recently have I concluded that the professing churches have **never yet** – not even in the first century – practiced New Covenant worship in Spirit and Truth.

But, admittedly, I did believe there was a “New Testament Pattern” to be recovered – which is simply to say, I believed the New Testament scriptures DO instruct us on worship in Spirit and Truth in fulfillment of what Jesus

spoke of in John 4. I still believe this.

So, in answer to the question, “**Why do we do what we do?**”, my response was: “**Because it is in the New Testament scriptures.**” And to give more detail in answer to that question I found it useful to cite that the apostolic church “gathered together”<sup>436</sup> on “the first day of the week” to “break bread” and take a “collection”<sup>437</sup>. And that they also did the activities highlighted in Acts 2:41-47:

*<sup>41</sup> “So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. <sup>42</sup> They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to (the apostles’) fellowship, to the **breaking of bread** and to **prayers**. <sup>43</sup> Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. <sup>46</sup> Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and **breaking bread from house to house**, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, <sup>47</sup> **praising God** and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”*

From this passage I would distill the following list of worship practices - I even decided it would be clever to call it a list of “Bodily Functions” of the Body of Christ as it might be more pleasing to “Organic” and “House” church enthusiasts:

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<sup>436</sup> Hebrews 10:25

<sup>437</sup> Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

- ❖ Apostolic teaching
- ❖ Apostolic fellowship<sup>438</sup>
- ❖ Breaking Bread<sup>439</sup>
- ❖ Prayers<sup>440</sup> (in homes and in the temple at specified times of the day)
- ❖ Praise

I would also point out that there is yet another list of activities highlighted in 1 Corinthians 14:26 which could be referred to as “Body Ministry”:

*“What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has **a psalm**, has **a teaching**, has **a revelation**, has **a tongue**, has **an interpretation**. Let all things be done for edification.”*

These “Bodily Functions” were distinguished from “*apostolic teaching and fellowship*”, indicating that there would be different types of church meetings, which could be “labeled” firstly, an “Equipping Ministry” meeting (“5-fold Ministry”)<sup>441</sup>, and secondly, a “Body Ministry” meeting (the whole church) which might also be combined with the “Breaking Bread”, “Prayer” and “Praise” activities. Then, I would devote myself to seeking a truly New Covenant understanding of each of these practices and teach them accordingly.

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<sup>438</sup> In his commentary on this verse, John Gill, reminds us that the disciples were also fellowshiping with the apostles. The syntax in the Greek text has both the teaching and the fellowship referring back to the apostles. In fact, *The Amplified Bible* translates it as: “the instruction and fellowship of the apostles”.

<sup>439</sup> I believe Breaking Bread is mistakenly equated with The Lord’s Supper. I will discuss this later in the article. But, I do believe Breaking Bread can be equated with everyday common fellowship meals, which is what seems to be indicated in Acts 2:46 and possibly 2 Peter 2:13 and Jude 1:12.

<sup>440</sup> Most Greek texts and English translations have the plural – “prayers”. These are formal prayers which would take place either in homes or daily in the temple at specified times.

<sup>441</sup> Ephesians 4:11-12

But recently, I have asked myself another question – actually, the Holy Spirit asked me this question: “What is it that you think you see in the New Testament scriptures?” In other words, does your perception of what you are reading contain any filters, preconceptions, presuppositions, or assumptions?

An Example of a “Filter”:

The list I made from Acts 2:41-47 leaves out certain other activities which were part of the life<sup>442</sup> of the first century church, at least at that given time – namely, “*were together and had all things in common*”, “*sold their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need*”, were “*day by day continuing with one mind in the temple*”, and “*were taking their meals together*”. Why aren’t these activities also part of our worship practices? Are they part of the New Covenant? Do they belong in the Old Covenant? These activities are in the New Testament scriptures – how are we to interpret them? Is it incongruous to interpret them differently than the other activities? If so, why so? Various biblical scholars have various theological or doctrinal reasons for their various interpretations.

It seems to me that, if we are going to make a list of New Covenant worship practices based on a particular passage, we should not pick and choose certain activities in the passage. We should include **all** the activities in the passage. If we pick and choose, we are forced to base our choices and

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<sup>442</sup> And therefore, part of the worship, since “worship” is a life lived in surrender and service to God.

omissions on some theological theory like “Cessationism”,<sup>443</sup> which is scripturally indefensible. So, what do I think? I think **all** the activities in that passage are on “equal ground”, so to speak. I think **all** the activities in that passage can be examples of New Covenant worship practices, **if led by the Spirit in the life of the Christians**. But I also think that none of those activities are examples of New Covenant worship if humanly separated, set apart, specified, humanly organized, and programmed only into meetings in which Christians gather.

An Example of Reading the New Testament Scriptures with Preconceptions, Presuppositions, or Assumptions:

*“The Collection”*

Acts 20:7 tells us this *“breaking bread”* on the first day of the week was being practiced specifically by Christians in Troas which Paul visited on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey, probably about 54 A.D. (a year before Paul wrote his first Letter to the Corinthians and 2 years before he wrote his Letter to the Galatians) Were Christians in other places also gathering together on the first day of the week to break bread? Possibly.

Please note that Luke does not say that the Christians in Troas also *“took a*

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<sup>443</sup> Or “dispensationalism”. The theory that God intended that certain spiritual gifts and practices were to exist only in the first century and then pass away. This theory is most often based on a poor exegesis of one verse of scripture, 1 Corinthians 13:10.



*collection*” on the first day of the week. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, Paul is writing to the Corinthians about “*the collection for the saints*”. He specifically told them to “*put aside and save*<sup>444</sup>, *as he may prosper*”. (We will look more closely at this phrase shortly.) He told them to do this “*on the first day of the week*”. Please note he did not mention whether or not the Corinthians gathered together on the first day of the week to break bread. Paul did say that he had previously also given the same direction about “*the collection*” to “*the churches in Galatia*”. What had he directed to churches in Galatia to do? “*Put aside and save*<sup>445</sup>, *as he may prosper.*” Did he tell the churches in Galatia to do it on “*the first day of the week*”? Seems plausible; but we really don’t know. When was it that he had told “*the churches in Galatia*” to do this? On his first missionary journey between 47 and 48 A.D. This was 8 or 9 years before he had written the Letter to the Galatians warning against “*the elementary principles of the world*”.<sup>446</sup> Paul encouraged the churches in Corinth and Galatia to help the church in Jerusalem materially because of the famine they were experiencing at the time. Paul was addressing this special and particular need. He was NOT establishing a “weekly collection” in the churches, as we know it today.

Paul made clear that he didn’t want to take a “collection” when he came. Please note he DID NOT tell the Corinthians to “take a collection” on the

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<sup>444</sup> Literally, “put by himself” (NASB reference).

<sup>445</sup> Literally, “put by himself” (NASB reference).

<sup>446</sup> Admittedly, there are two theories regarding the destination and dating of the Letter to the Galatians: To Southern Galatia in 49 A.D. or to Northern Galatia in 56/57 A.D.

first day of the week. He told them to “*put aside and save*<sup>447</sup>, as he may prosper”.

This is what two major Greek scholars have to say about this phrase:

M.R. Vincent:

“Lay by him in store (παρ̄ ἑαυτῷ τιθέτω θησαυρίζων)

Lit., put by himself treasuring. **Put by at home.**”<sup>448</sup>

A.T. Robertson:

“Lay by him in store (par' heautōi tithetō thēsaurizōn). **By himself, in his home.** Treasuring it (cf. Matthew 6:19 for thēsaurizō). Have the habit of doing it, tithetō (present imperative).”<sup>449</sup>

Paul was NOT establishing a weekly collection at a weekly church service.

Another Example of Reading the New Testament Scriptures with Preconceptions, Presuppositions, or Assumptions:

“*Body Ministry*”<sup>450</sup>(1 Corinthians 14:26)

Concerning the “Body Ministry” pictured in 1 Corinthians 14:26: How long

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<sup>447</sup> Literally, “put by himself” (NASB reference).

<sup>448</sup> *Vincent's Word Studies*

<sup>449</sup> *Robertson's New Testament Word Pictures*

<sup>450</sup> I prefer to use the term, “Body Ministry”, where each member of the Body may bring forth something from the Holy Spirit of the life of Christ to share with and edify His Body. Others may prefer to use different terms to refer to this type of ministry.

did the Corinthians practice such activities in that way? Paul didn't mention these activities or this particular type of meeting in his second letter to the Corinthians. We can, and many do, assume that this was an established worship practice, but we actually do not know how long the Corinthians continued in the worship practices pictured in that verse. It is certainly a valid understanding that in this passage Paul is **not commanding or even suggesting that they should do** these activities – he simply wrote that when they came together they were doing these activities. Did the churches in Rome, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica also practice these activities and have this particular type of meetings? We don't know – Paul doesn't mention that in his epistles to these churches. We “Organic” and “House” church people would like to think that all of the Christian churches during the apostolic period conducted these activities and meetings. But this idea emerges from a preconception or presupposition. Making such an assertion can only be based on an assumption. Of more significance, making such an assertion is in accordance with “*the elementary principles of the world*”. How so? To hold the perspective that all the Christian churches gathered at separated, set apart, special times and places and practiced “Body Ministry” according to the letter of 1 Corinthians 14:26, and that Paul had somehow established this as a worship practice in all the first century churches, and that it is the “New Testament Pattern” for us to follow today, all reveals a proclivity for “technique” – a predilection for human systematizing, ordering and programming activities for the church, in place of the life flow of the Holy

Spirit and the Headship of Christ.

So, what do I think of 1 Corinthians 14:26? I think the “Body Ministry” pictured in that passage can be an example of New Covenant worship, if **led by the Spirit in the life of the Christians**. But I also think that such a meeting is not an example of New Covenant worship if humanly separated, set apart, specified, humanly organized, and programmed only into meetings in which Christians gather.

## **Descriptive or Prescriptive?**

*Both are “the Letter”. Neither is the whole story. Both fall short of the glory.*

So, if reading the New Testament scriptures with filters, preconceptions, presuppositions, and assumptions is insufficient, then what is needed? In asking this question, we are simply asking to know what we, as contemporary Christians, need to do as the first century Christians did in the New Testament, and what we do not need to do even though the first century Christians did. This is, indeed, a reasonable question. Theologically, this question is put forward as: “In the New Testament scriptures,<sup>451</sup> what is ‘**prescriptive**’ (we need to do it) and what is merely ‘**descriptive**’ (we don’t have to do it<sup>452</sup>)?” The answer to that question is not as simple as: “If it’s in

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<sup>451</sup> Another theological question is: “What is the relevance of the Old Testament Law in the life of Christians?” There are various views. Some of the main views are presented in the Zondervan Counterpoints book, “Five Views on Law and Gospel”, previously titled, “The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian”.

<sup>452</sup> In the case of the “descriptive”, often there is nothing wrong in doing it; but sometimes there is – if it intrinsically contradicts the New Covenant. Whereas, with the “prescriptive, the principle is that it is in accord with the essence of the New Covenant.

the New Testament, you need to do it – that’s the ‘New Testament Pattern’.”

Some believe that everything we read in the New Testament scriptures is what the Holy Spirit told the apostolic church to do. The assumption here is that the apostolic church did everything the Holy Spirit told them to do. The reality is: What we read in New Testament scriptures is simply **what the apostolic church did**. It remains to be discerned “Why they did what they did?” In each instance, were they responding to a Holy Spirit **command** or **cultural custom**?

A survey and study of the New Testament will reveal that some passages contradict other passages with regards to what the first century Christians were doing and what the apostles were writing. For example, some of what Paul wrote in his epistles contradicts what Christians – Jewish and Gentile – are found doing in the Acts of the Apostles. In fact, as I’ve pointed out in past articles, some of what we see Paul himself doing in Acts is contradicted by what he wrote in his epistles.<sup>453</sup> This obviously indicates that Christians were sometimes doing something other than what the Holy Spirit wanted. Consequently, we usually can find passages in the epistles where an apostle is writing to rectify those situations. Again, “**prescriptive**” is “what we need to do”, and “**descriptive**” is “what they did, but we don’t necessarily have to do it”.

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<sup>453</sup> See *Old Covert Undertow in the Early Church* and “Led by the Spirit” For complimentary .PDF copies, email: [AtChristTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristTable@gmail.com)

When theologians interpret the New Testament scriptures through this “**prescriptive – descriptive**” lens, they must employ some doctrinal rules by which decisions can be made to determine “which is which”. I find it amazing how the resulting categorizations vary! But here are some rules which make sense to me. They are ultimately imperfect and insufficient, for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is pre-requisite:

- Firstly, we are utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit to give us the understanding of the scriptures He Himself inspired.<sup>454</sup> For this to happen, we must have a teachable spirit characterized by humility, and a desire for the “the mind of Christ” which chooses objectivity over our filters, our preconceptions, our presuppositions, and our assumptions.
- Our approach to the scriptures has two goals: The **interpretation**<sup>455</sup> of their meaning and their **application** for our lives. What we are primarily concerned with in this article is the question of **application** – what in the New Testament scriptures is “normative” for the church age? Even within the classic Evangelical-Pentecostal perspective, there can be agreement on interpretation yet variance on application. Again, this article is dealing essentially with **application**.
- The gospels were written with the intention of being historical records – that is, records which are **descriptive** of the life, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. However, these records

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<sup>454</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:10-16

<sup>455</sup> It is not in the scope of this article to discuss principles of interpretation. There are many good articles available about principles of sound biblical hermeneutics. Here are two: “Principles of Biblical Interpretation” by James Davis - <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-6-principles-biblical-interpretation> and “Hermeneutical Principles” by R.C. Sproul - <https://www.monergism.com/hermeneutical-principles>

also contain the teachings of Christ, which, of course, would be considered **prescriptive**. But it must be remembered that Jesus' audience was the Jewish people; and he spoke to them as people under the Old Covenant.<sup>456</sup> But He spoke to them as having “more authority” than the Old Testament Law<sup>457</sup>, as One who was “raising the bar”, as it were, by introducing new inward requirements that bear on previously established commandments when He says: “*You have heard that it was said, but I say to you ....*”

- **The Acts of the Apostles** records a mixture of what pertained to the Jews under the Old Covenant and what pertained to the Gentiles included in the New Covenant. During the first century, there was, in fact, a time of transition, where aspects of both covenants were practiced.<sup>458</sup>
- **The Epistles**, which were obviously written after the New Covenant was established, are “normative” for Christians throughout the church age.
- **The original intention of the writer** is key for accurate interpretation and application of scripture.
- **Jesus' Intention**: Considering whether or not something Jesus said in the gospels is “normative” or “prescriptive” for Christians in the church age would require discerning Jesus' intention in the given passage, as

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<sup>456</sup> Matthew 15:24; 10:5-6

<sup>457</sup> Matthew 7:28-29

<sup>458</sup> See Old Covent Undertow in the Early Church and “Led by the Spirit” For complimentary .PDF copies, email: [AtChristTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristTable@gmail.com)

to whether or not it “belongs” to the New Covenant. Of course, if we see that what Jesus said is also clearly “**prescribed**” by an apostolic writer in an epistle, then that also indicates it to be “**normative**” or “**prescriptive**” for Christians throughout the church age. The apostle Paul specifies that we Christians are not under the Old Covenant Law, but “*under the law of Christ*”<sup>459</sup>, which is the teaching of Christ found in the gospels, where Jesus is revealed as the Living Word, the *teleios*<sup>460</sup> of the scriptures, the goal of the law and fulfillment of the law.<sup>461</sup>

- Luke’s Intention: I am of the opinion that Luke made it clear in the opening lines of his gospel and The Acts of the Apostles that it was his intention to record history – not to prescribe doctrine.<sup>462</sup> So I think Acts should be taken as primarily “**descriptive**” rather than “**prescriptive**”. In stating this perspective, I am NOT implying that the supernatural displays of the Holy Spirit in The Acts of the Apostles are not “normative” for the church age. In my mind that is a separate issue from the “descriptive” / “prescriptive” paradigm. I am not a “Cessationist” - I don’t believe anything about God has “ceased” – including His supernatural power. Being eternal, the Holy Spirit cannot be limited to Old Covenant and New Covenant theologies. It is His nature to be supernatural – He always was and always will be supernatural. And this supernatural power was displayed ON and

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<sup>459</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2.

<sup>460</sup> Greek, *teleios*, Strong’s # 5046: that which is perfect, complete, consummate

<sup>461</sup> Romans 110:4; Matthew 5:17.

<sup>462</sup> Luke 1:1-4 & Acts 1:1-2



THROUGH human beings in the Old Testament and IN and THROUGH human beings in the New Covenant. The “descriptive” / “prescriptive” paradigm falls short of **the glory – which is Christ**.

- **The Apostles’ Intention**: Lastly, we must correctly discern the intention of the apostles in their epistles in order to accurately interpret whether or not particular things they wrote were intended by the Holy Spirit to be “normative” or “prescribed” for Christians throughout the church age. Once again, I must add: I am NOT implying that any of the gifts of the Spirit mentioned in the epistles are merely “descriptive” of the first century church but later “ceased”. It is impossible to defend the “Cessationist” theory with sound exegesis. The gifts of the Spirit are a separate issue from the “descriptive” / “prescriptive” paradigm. The Holy Spirit – “the Eternal Spirit”<sup>463</sup> - was poured out on the Day of Pentecost and the resurrected Christ “gave gifts to men” – to each “a measure of Christ’s gift”.<sup>464</sup> This is not only an aspect of the New Covenant; this is an aspect of “the riches of His grace and glory”<sup>465</sup> . The “descriptive” / “prescriptive” paradigm falls short of **the glory – which is Christ**. Yet, I must add: the glory of Christ is also not limited to the gifts of the Spirit and far exceeds supernatural power displays.

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<sup>463</sup> Hebrews 9:14

<sup>464</sup> Ephesians 4:7-16; 1 Peter 4:10-11

<sup>465</sup> Ephesians 1:7, 3:8 & 16

## The "Letter" Falls Short of the Glory of Christ

The following passage, 2 Corinthians 3:4-18, clearly contrasts the Old and the New Covenants. I'd like to say a few things here about the phrase "of the Letter" which is in contrast to the phrase "of the Spirit".

*<sup>4</sup>Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. <sup>5</sup>Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, <sup>6</sup>who also made us adequate as **servants of a new covenant**, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for **the letter kills**, but **the Spirit gives life**. <sup>7</sup>But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with **glory**, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the **glory** of his face, fading as it was, <sup>8</sup>how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with **glory**? <sup>9</sup>For if the ministry of condemnation has **glory**, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in **glory**. <sup>10</sup>For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it. <sup>11</sup>For if that which fades away was with **glory**, much more that which remains is in **glory**. <sup>12</sup>Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, <sup>13</sup>and are not like Moses, who used to put a **veil** over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. <sup>14</sup>But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same **veil** remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. <sup>15</sup>But to this day whenever Moses is read, a **veil** lies over their heart; <sup>16</sup>but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. <sup>17</sup>Now the Lord is **the Spirit**, and where **the Spirit** of the Lord is, there is **liberty**. <sup>18</sup>But we all, with **unveiled** face, beholding as in a mirror **the glory of the Lord**, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, **the Spirit**.*

To begin with, we must specify what Paul means by “the glory”. A few verses after this passage, Paul uses the phrases, “*the glory of Christ who is the image of God*” and “*the Light of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ*”.<sup>466</sup> **Clearly, “the glory of the Lord” – the “out-shining” of God – is Jesus Christ.** The manifestation of this glory is the purpose of the New Covenant, and therefore Christ must be the Pattern of the New Testament.<sup>467</sup>

Paul used the phrase, “*From glory to glory*”. Indicating that both covenants had “glory”, he refers to going “**from glory**” (of the Old Covenant) “**to glory**” (of the New Covenant)”. But indeed, what had glory (the Old Covenant), in this case has no glory because of the glory (the New Covenant) that surpasses it. The revelation of Christ and the transformation into His image by the working of the Holy Spirit surpasses “the Letter of the Law”, making the glory of the Old Covenant pale and dead in comparison to the New Covenant.

To insist on operating according to “the Letter of the Law”, in effect, puts a veil over the glory of Christ. With the revelation of Christ, God has taken away the veil, but to insist on “the Letter of the Law” throws the veil over the glory of Christ.

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<sup>466</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:4 & 6; Cf. Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:3

<sup>467</sup> The article “I Have Given You as a Covenant” deals with Christ as the “Pattern” for the New Testament.

The “Pattern” to be manifested in the New Covenant is *“the glory of the Lord”*, which is the image of Christ. The practice of “the elementary principles of the world” places a “veil” over the revelation of Christ, who is the New Testament Pattern.

Moses maintaining a veil over his face, is a picture of our self-effort to keep the glory of God. Self-effort was the vehicle in the Old Covenant. But in the New Covenant, the agent of transformation (into that glory) is not through our self-effort in keeping of “the letter” given by Moses in the Old Covenant, but through the Spirit given by Jesus in the New Covenant - that is, by beholding (through revelation) the image of Christ revealed by the Spirit and surrendering to the Spirit to be transformed into His image. The “Pattern” to be manifested in the New Covenant is *“the glory of the Lord”*, which is the image of Christ. The practice of “the elementary principles of the world” places a “veil” over the revelation of Christ, who is the New Testament Pattern.

The “Descriptive”/“Prescriptive Paradigm is still nothing more than “the Letter”

In this article, I have been attempting to give a few examples of accurately and inaccurately discerning the intentions of the New Testament writers – that is, what was actually “normative” or “prescriptive” and what was not. But, I have to admit that the “descriptive” / “prescriptive” paradigm is not

satisfying to me, as I see the whole idea of prescriptions of certain activities as being at the very core of “the elementary principles of the world”. Again, it is not the activities themselves which are problematic, it is the prescribing of those activities which I perceive as “of the Letter” and therefore violates the essence of the New Covenant by promoting a ministry “of the letter” rather than “of the Spirit” – “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”. I am more of the persuasion to say that whatever is descriptive of Christ is prescriptive. But those are thoughts and words for future articles. For now, let’s continue on with addressing two other activities which are conventionally considered “normative” for the church age – *“Gathering together on the first day of the week”*, which some understand to be **“a worship service”**, and *“breaking bread”*, which some understand to be **“the Lord’s Supper”**.

# Sacramental Sunday

## “Gathering together on the first day of the week”

In the New Testament, there are only two mentions of “the first day of the week” in reference to what took place during the first century beginning with the Day of Pentecost – namely, Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 .<sup>468</sup>

Many Christians assume these two references **describe** – and also **prescribe** – “worship services” because “the breaking bread” and “the collection” are mentioned. In fact, these two scripture references seem to be the font from which springs the idea of the **“Sunday Morning Worship Service”**, which itself also contains other worship practices. But is that idea accurate? Or is it just another example of a preconception, or presupposition or assumption?

## Acts 20:7

Acts 20:7 tells us that Christians were indeed “*gathered together on the first day of the week*”. These were Christians in Troas. Please note that Luke does not say that the Christians in Troas also “*took a collection*” on the first day of the week. But were all Christians in other places also “*gathering together on the first day of the week*”? We cannot say that based on the New Testament

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<sup>468</sup> Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:2 & 9, Luke 24:1 and John 20:1 & 19 mention “the first day of the week”, but all have to do with the resurrection of Christ, which is not at issue here. And these passages do not mention anything about “gathering together for worship”. John 20:19 clearly says the reason the disciples had been staying together in the upper room was “for fear of the Jews”, not “for worship” per se.

scriptures.

## 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, Paul told the Corinthians to “*put aside and save*<sup>469</sup>, as he may prosper” “*on the first day of the week*”. Please note he did not mention whether or not the Corinthians “*gathered together on the first day of the week*”. Paul also said that he had previously given the same direction - to “*put aside and save*<sup>470</sup>, as he may prosper” - to “*the churches in Galatia*”. Did he tell the churches in Galatia to do that on “*the first day of the week*”? We cannot say that based on the New Testament scriptures. In any case, as we discussed earlier, most likely what was being “put aside” was being put aside at home, not at a public gathering.<sup>471</sup> When was it that he had told “*the churches in Galatia*” to do this? On his first missionary journey between 47 and 48 A.D. This was 8 or 9 years before he had written the Letter to the Galatians warning against “*the elementary principles of the world*”.<sup>472</sup> My argument in this article is that making such prescriptions are in accordance with “*the elementary principles of the world*”.

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<sup>469</sup> Literally, “put by himself” (NASB reference).

<sup>470</sup> Literally, “put by himself” (NASB reference).

<sup>471</sup> See pp. 14-16.

<sup>472</sup> Admittedly, there are two theories regarding the destination and dating of the Letter to the Galatians: To Southern Galatia in 49 A.D. or to Northern Galatia in 56/57 A.D.

## Hebrews 10:25

There is no scripture in the New Testament which indicates that Christians must “go to church”, so to speak. But many Christians point to Hebrews 10:25 in connection with *“gathering together on the first day of the week”* for a **“Sunday Worship Service”**. The verse speaks of “gathering together”; but what is the nature of the “gathering together”? Let’s look at the context of the verse, the writer’s intention, and compare scripture with scripture for the meaning and application.

The verse says: *“not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some”*. Nowhere in this verse, nor in the whole of the context, is “the first day of the week” mentioned. Neither is “worship” mentioned.

What is the writer’s **intention** in Hebrews 10? The Letter to the Hebrews was written in 68 or 69 A.D., just prior to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. In response to the Jewish Revolt in 66 A.D., there was fierce persecution and intense suffering for the Hebrews under Nero.<sup>473</sup> Many were tempted to turn away from Christ and go back to Judaism just to escape the persecution and suffering. In verses 32 through 34, the writer reminds the Hebrews of how, *“in the formers days, when, after being enlightened”, (they) endured great conflict of sufferings”*. He said they

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<sup>473</sup> Cf. [https://www.bible-history.com/nero/NEROThe\\_Jewish\\_Revolt.htm](https://www.bible-history.com/nero/NEROThe_Jewish_Revolt.htm)



endured so well *“knowing (they) had a better possession and a lasting one”*. Then in verses 35 and 36 he says: *“Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.”* In verse 37, the writer points to the goal: *“He who is coming will come....”* That is the writer’s **intention** - to strongly exhort the Hebrews not to fall away from Christ and go back to Judaism in order to escape persecution and suffering, but rather to **ENDURE UNTIL THEY ARE GATHERED TOGETHER WITH CHRIST AT HIS COMING**.

Let’s look at the immediate context - verses 23 through 25:

*“<sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; <sup>24</sup> and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not forsaking our own gathering together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”*

*“Our own gathering together”* has something to do with *“our hope”*. The apostle Paul wrote to Titus: *“... looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.”<sup>474</sup>* *“Our hope”* is the appearing (coming) of our Lord Jesus Christ. What the writer to the Hebrews wrote is remarkably similar to what the apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians<sup>475</sup>: *“Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, <sup>2</sup> that you not be quickly*

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<sup>474</sup> Titus 2:13

<sup>475</sup> Some think that Paul is also, in fact, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews. But the general consensus is that the authorship of the Letter to the Hebrews is still debatable.

*shaken from your composure or be disturbed....*"<sup>476</sup> **"Our hope" is "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him"**. The apostles are saying: *"Between now and then, 'do not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed', 'hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering', 'stimulate one another to love and good deeds, encourage one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.'"* THAT is what the "gathering together" is all about. The writer to the Hebrews doesn't want to see them also stop gathering - as some of those who had fallen away - because of Nero's persecution. He doesn't want to see them go backwards to Judaism, because of Nero's persecution of Christians. He doesn't want to see them forsake Christ before His coming, and thus lose their hope and their reward. No, he wants them to **"gather together" in order to stimulate and encourage one another to hold fast the confession of our hope until the day of Christ's coming and our gathering together with Him, because that is our promised hope and reward.**

I'll let the reader choose the better paraphrase:

*"We are to continue 'gathering together' encouraging ourselves and others with our promised hope and reward until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him."*

Or – *"We are to 'gather together' because the scripture commands us to sing songs, say prayers, hear a sermon, and give money on Sunday mornings".*<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2

<sup>477</sup> An excellent article for further study of Hebrews 10:25: "What are We Not to Forsake?" by Peter Ditzel <https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/hebrews1025.pdf>

So, what do the New Testament scriptures tell us about Christians “gathering together on the first day of the week”? Arguing solely from the scriptures, we cannot make a case that it was “normative” or “prescribed” even in the first century. Therefore, we cannot assume that the apostle Paul intended “gathering together on the first day of the week” to be “normative” or “prescriptive” for the church age. For various reasons, this is a minority opinion. But are those reasons valid? I don’t think they can be supported by scripture.

## Historical Documents

### The Didache

Some point to early historical writings to support the idea of “gathering together on the first day of the week”. In the *Didache* (“The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles”), which was written between 80 and 90 A.D., the first line of the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter has been (mistakenly) translated: “*On the Lord’s day, gather yourselves together and break bread ....*” Citing this translation, some argue that Christians were “gathering together on the first day of the week” to “worship” during the first century, and somehow by extension, conclude that it is “normative” and “prescriptive” for the whole of the church age. Firstly, this is not inspired scripture, it is historical writing. Secondly, the word “day” (Greek: *hemera*) does not appear in the Greek text of this sentence in the *Didache*. The sentence would be more accurately translated: “*According to*

*the command of the Lord,*<sup>478</sup> *gather together and break bread....*” The only scripture in the New Testament which contains the phrase, “*On the Lord’s Day*” or “*On the day which belongs to the Lord*”<sup>479</sup> is Revelation 1:10; and it too is a reference to the Sabbath (the seventh day). Thirdly, “the first day of the week” is not even mentioned in the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of the *Didache*. Now, it is true that later in history, Sunday came to be designated as “the Lord’s Day”. But in the first century, the Sabbath (the seventh day) was designated as “*the day which belongs to the Lord*” or “*the Lord’s Day*”. Jesus, Himself, confirms this in the gospels, when He declares, “*The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.*”<sup>480</sup> Frank W. Hardy has written an excellent article on this subject. This is his conclusion on the matter: “Today, ‘Lord’s day’ means Sunday to a large majority of Christians. As early as the late second century it meant Sunday. From this does it follow that it ‘Lord’s day’ meant Sunday in the early second century and beyond that in the late first century? Such a conclusion goes beyond the evidence. The gospels are part of the documentary evidence bearing on this question. They must be allowed to have their input. When they do, it is clear that the ‘Lord’s day’ in the earliest Christian decades was not the first day of the week, but the seventh (see Rev 1:10; Matt 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). If this is the case, the change occurred later. When? ... Appeals to early Christian practice fall short if they do not include the church’s earliest practice. But to answer the question, the change occurred for the most part during the late second century. In this

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<sup>478</sup> Greek: *kata kuriaken de kuriou*, meaning “according to the command of the Lord”.

<sup>479</sup> This is a different set of words: Greek: *te kuriake hemera*, meaning “on the Lord’s day”.

<sup>480</sup> Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5

Alexandria and Rome led the way.”<sup>481</sup>

### *The First Apology*

We can read in Justin Martyr’s *First Apology*, written around 156 A.D.,<sup>482</sup> that Christians were gathering together on Sunday for a meeting conducted much like a conventional contemporary “worship service”.<sup>483</sup> But, there is no historical evidence or biblical evidence that Christians *“gathered on the first day of the week”* during the first century. Of course, when the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., the gathering place was then limited to the synagogues and houses. The consensus of biblical scholarship is that after the apostolic period, Jewish Christians continued to “worship” on the Sabbath (the seventh day) in synagogues; and Gentile Christians “worshipped” on both the Sabbath (the seventh day) and *“the first day of the week”* in houses. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century more and more dissent gradually arose among Gentile Christians about keeping Jewish customs, including the Sabbath (the seventh day).<sup>484</sup> The Edit of Constantine in 321 A.D. mandated Sunday as a legal “day of rest” - not “worship” per se. Nevertheless, this served to further solidify the separation of the two days of “worship” – Saturday and Sunday – as well as the two religions – Judaism

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<sup>481</sup> *“The Lord’s Day in the Didache”* (2010), Frank W. Hardy.

<sup>482</sup> Justin Martyr’s *“First Apology”* may be dated internally from the statement in chapter 6 that “Christ was born one hundred and fifty years ago under Cyrenius.” Since Cyrenius (the Greek form of the full name in Latin, Publius Sulpicius Quirinus) entered office in the year 6 A.D. according to first century Jewish historian, Josephus. So, the apology may be dated 156 A.D.

<sup>483</sup> Cf. *“The Early Christians: A Sourcebook on the Witness of the Early Church”*, by Eberhard Arnold, pp. 222-225 & 388-390.

<sup>484</sup> Cf. *“The Lord’s Day in the Didache”* (2010), Frank W. Hardy.

and Christianity.

# Sacramentalism & the New Testament Scriptures

## The Lord's Supper & Breaking Bread

Thus far in this article, I've addressed

- "Gathering together on the first day of the week"
- "A Body Ministry Meeting"
- "The Collection"
- "Breaking Bread"

According to the conventional perspective (*"the elementary principles of the world"*), *"gathering together on the first day of the week"* gives rise to the idea of "a Sunday Morning Worship Service" consisting of various religious activities including "The Collection" and "The Lord's Supper".<sup>485</sup> It is specifically the ritual (or activity) of **"breaking bread"** in a public gathering which introduces the idea of "the Lord's Supper". "Sacramentalism" is based upon the conventional idea that Jesus instituted the "sacraments" of "Baptism" and "the Lord's Supper" and commanded the Church to practice these "sacraments" until His return. In Christendom, I think a commonly accepted definition of a "sacrament" is: A religious ceremony or ritual regarded as a physical and outward act or sign representing spiritual and inward reality.<sup>486</sup> Now, the various groups in Christendom do differ as to

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<sup>485</sup> Some groups have "the Lord's Supper" weekly on a Sunday, and some have it monthly on a Sunday, always included in the "Sunday morning worship service". (Many have "the Lord's Supper" at special times in the "liturgical year", as well.)

<sup>486</sup> As defined by the 16th-century Anglican theologian, Richard Hooker, the sacraments are said to be "visible signs of invisible grace"; similarly, the *Catechism* of the 1662 version states that a sacrament is "an outward and

whether that physical and outward sign represents **an act of the Christian** – that is, an act expressing an aspect of his faith, or **an act of God** – that is, a work of divine grace. Without going into very lengthy discussions of things which do not pertain to the focus of this article, I will offer this example of the different views regarding “the Lord’s Supper” – very simply: Some practice “the Lord’s Supper” primarily as **an act of faith** - that is, in “remembering” and in “declaring His death”. And others practice “the Lord’s Supper” primarily as **a means of receiving grace from God** - that is, “by eating and drinking of the life of Christ”.

I would like to suggest that the very nature of a “sacrament”, being a physical and outward sign, puts it into the theological category of an Old Covenant type or shadow which symbolically represents Christ or an aspect of the work of Christ.<sup>487</sup> And as we have previously discussed, to continue in the practice of customs (types and shadows) in the Old Covenant which has been made “obsolete” by the establishment of the New Covenant<sup>488</sup>, is to be operating under “*the elementary principles of the world*”, as the apostle Paul indicated.<sup>489</sup>

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visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given to us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof."

<sup>487</sup> Colossians 2:17

<sup>488</sup> Hebrews 8:13

<sup>489</sup> Galatians 4:1-10; Colossians 2:8-23.



While the majority – not all, but the majority – of Christians believe that Christ “instituted” the “sacrament” of “the Lord’s Supper”,<sup>490</sup> in this article, I would like to challenge that idea. I do this “*with fear and trembling*”<sup>491</sup>, but also “*trembling at His word*”<sup>492</sup>, so to speak. I would like to very briefly demonstrate from scripture that the conventional idea of “sacraments” may not be based in the New Testament scriptures.<sup>493</sup> And, I have included an Addendum to this article which presents a more in-depth, scripture-based, theological argument for the “non-sacramental” view - specifically, an extended excerpt from the writing of Joseph John Gurney.

### “Do this in remembrance of Me”

This is a key phrase connected with what has come to be called “the Lord’s Supper”. Jesus said it in Luke 22:19-22. (It doesn’t appear in the other gospel accounts.) And Paul quoted it in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. I’m inclined to believe that Paul understood what Jesus meant when He said this, because he “*received it from the Lord*”. So, both Jesus and Paul meant the same thing by this phrase. Let’s see what they meant:

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<sup>490</sup> The Salvation Army and The Society of Religious Friends (Quakers), as well as some non-denominational groups, do not practice “the Lord’s Supper” (nor “Baptism”).

<sup>491</sup> Philippians 2:12

<sup>492</sup> Isaiah 66:2

<sup>493</sup> The two “sacraments” commonly practiced in all of Christendom are “Baptism” and “the Lord’s Supper”. In this article, I will discuss only “the Lord’s Supper”, as my theme is *the worship praxes of the contemporary professing churches*. “The Lord’s Supper”, or “Communion”, or “the Eucharist” is conventionally practiced in Sunday morning worship services regularly either weekly or monthly. “Baptism” is conventionally only done once in a person’s life and is not seen as an activity to be repeated weekly or monthly in Sunday morning worship services. However, for excellent presentations of a “non-sacramental” view of Baptism, I would highly recommend: “*The Papal and Hierarchical System Compared with the Religion of the New Testament*” by Joseph John Gurney and “*The Sacraments and the Bible*” by Phil Layton.

## Luke 22

*<sup>19</sup> “And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” <sup>20</sup> And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.”*

Who said this? Jesus. Jesus was a Jew who was sent to the Jews.<sup>494</sup> Who did He say it to? His disciples, all of whom were Jews. Jesus is not speaking to Gentile Christians, as there were no Gentile Christians until after His Resurrection and Ascension.

What is the context? Jesus and His disciples are celebrating the Passover. This was not a common fellowship meal which the Jews referred to as “breaking bread”.<sup>495</sup> According to Leviticus 23, Jews were required to celebrate the feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover meal each year.<sup>496</sup> Jesus did not say how often this was to be done, as all Jews knew it was to be done yearly. So, the context is the celebration of the Jewish Passover meal.

Now let’s go on to the passage which Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

## 1 Corinthians 11

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<sup>494</sup> Matthew 15:24; Cf. Matthew 10:5-6.

<sup>495</sup> See my eBook, **Breaking of Bread**, a complimentary copy of which can be obtained by emailing:

[AtChristTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristTable@gmail.com)

<sup>496</sup> Matthew 26:1-2, 17-20, 26-29

*<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; <sup>24</sup> and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” <sup>25</sup> In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’”*

Although known as an “apostle to the Gentiles”, Paul was a devout Jew.<sup>497</sup> He never gave up reaching out to the Jews with the gospel of Christ.<sup>498</sup> And, he practiced all the Jewish customs for approximately 23 years after his conversion to Christ.<sup>499</sup> As a Jewish Christian, he taught that “Christ had been sacrificed as our Passover”, but also advocated the celebration of the Passover feast.<sup>500</sup>

It is important to note that the Corinthians he is writing this epistle to are all Jews.<sup>501</sup> He is writing to them about the shameful way they were celebrating the Passover. And, at this point he refers to the Passover meal as “the Lord’s Supper”.

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<sup>497</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:22; Acts 22:3; 23:6; 26:4; Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5

<sup>498</sup> Acts 21:13

<sup>499</sup> Cf. Acts 21:21-24. Paul advocated and practiced the Jewish customs from 33 to 56 A.D. And then advocated against practicing the Old Testament customs, having come to identify them as “the elementary principles of the world”. See *Old Covenant Undertow in the Early Church* and “Led by the Spirit” For complimentary .PDF copies, email: [AtChristTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristTable@gmail.com)

<sup>500</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:7-8. He wrote 1 Corinthians in 55 A.D. Just a year later, he wrote 2 Corinthians and Galatians. In these epistles, it is plain that he had come to see that keeping the letter of the Old Covenant law was bondage to “the elementary principles of the world”.

<sup>501</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:1-2

## 1 Corinthians 11:17, 20-22

<sup>17</sup>“But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. <sup>20</sup>Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper, <sup>21</sup>for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry, and another is drunk. <sup>22</sup>What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.”

Please note that this is the first – and only – time the term, “the Lord’s Supper” is used in the New Testament scriptures. It is a term which only Paul used, and he is used it with reference to the Passover meal – not breaking of bread.

Why can I say that he is not referring to a common fellowship meal called “breaking bread”? There are a number of reasons:

- 1) Paul clearly identified the occasion with the Passover meal which Jesus had celebrated with His disciples.<sup>502</sup>
- 2) In verse 20, Paul said they were gathering together for the purpose of celebrating “the Lord’s Supper”, yet the way the people were conducting it contradicted, denied, and went against the term.
- 3) In verse 22, when Paul exclaims, “*What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink?*”, does it not imply that this was a special occasion (the Passover) and not just a regular fellowship meal (“breaking bread”)? In verse 34, he writes, “*If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will*

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<sup>502</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:23-25 and Luke 22:19-20.

*not come together for judgment.*” In other words: “If you are really that hungry, eat a meal at home, and then come and celebrate the Passover in a worthy manner.”

4) Don't the warnings of harsh judgments in verses 27, 29-30 seem to be more commensurate to a consequence of conducting oneself in a manner unworthy of a special religious feast, rather than a common everyday fellowship meal?

### 1 Corinthians 11:27-30

*<sup>27</sup> Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. <sup>29</sup> For he who eats and drinks, eats, and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. <sup>30</sup> For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.”*

1 Corinthians 11:20-30 was written to Jewish Christians who were still celebrating the Jewish Passover in the first century. The notion that Christ instituted this as a “sacrament” to be practiced by Christians throughout the church age is a notion which is not based in the New Testament scriptures. But it was so that Christians from the second century and onward “gathered together on the first day of the week” for a “worship service”. However, this was contrary to scripture – namely, exhortations in the apostle Paul’s epistles, such as: Galatians 4:1-10, particularly v. 10: “*You observe days and months and seasons and years.*”, and Colossians 2:8, 16-23, particularly v. 16: “*Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day.*”

The practice of “Communion” or “the Eucharist”<sup>503</sup>, consisting of just a wafer of wheat and a sip of wine, cannot be equated with this Passover meal. And the “agape meal”, consisting of a meal and fellowship, which may or may not also incorporate “Communion”<sup>504</sup>, also cannot be equated with this Passover. We are certainly free to “remember” and “declare” Jesus’ death and resurrection at any meal – anytime we “break bread” – anytime we have a meal and fellowship with other Christians “at table”<sup>505</sup>; but to “prescribe” or establish as “normative” these customs as a “sacrament” which must be practiced throughout the church age is another thing. Another thing which I would suggest is spiritually “harmful”. “Spiritually harmful”? How can I make such a statement?

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<sup>503</sup> This also may be referred to as “the Lord’s Supper” or “the Lord’s Table” and is observed by almost all Protestant denominations and “non-denominational” churches either weekly or monthly.

<sup>504</sup> This is observed by most “Organic” or “House” churches weekly.

<sup>505</sup> Again, I recommend by eBook “**Breaking of Bread**”. [AtChristTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristTable@gmail.com)

# What's the Harm?

In his book, *“Custom and Command”*<sup>506</sup>, Stan Firth’s stated purpose was this: “All I am trying to do in this book is to encourage dear friends in the unstructured churches that they are well within God’s framework in the way they are moving; and to re-assure dear friends in the ‘structured’ churches that those of us who have ‘gone unstructured’ have not gone off the rails, as they may have feared.” He also stated: “If you are a regular Sunday worshipper and an enthusiastic member of a local ‘structured’ fellowship, there is no reason why you should discontinue your custom, unless, of course, God were to bring a contrary conviction to you.”<sup>507</sup>

Since my main purpose has been to investigate the New Testament scriptures for answers to difficult questions I have had to ask myself, and to provide sound scriptural and theological reasons for moving beyond humanly structured church life in search of an expression of New Covenant worship in Spirit and Truth, I would say my purpose does go a bit beyond saying, “There is no harm done, if you want to continue in your conventional customs.”

A summary of the argument I have presented in this article is this: **The prescriptions that Christians throughout the church age must “gather**

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<sup>506</sup> Some of what I have done in this article is similar to Firth’s approach in his book, “Custom & Command”, with “Descriptive” equating with “Custom”, and “Prescriptive” equating with “Command”.

<sup>507</sup> P 22

together”, take a “collection”, and “break bread” “on the first day of the week” are primary examples of “the elementary principles of the world”<sup>508</sup>.

If one is able to accept that statement, then one must also acknowledge that, by definition, *“the elementary principles of the world”* are tools of the “powers and principalities”<sup>509</sup>, which thus far have effectively kept the Church under the shadow of the Old Covenant with regards to its worship praxes and falling short of fulfilling its calling to gather and function as the Ecclesia of the Kingdom of God. In short, through “the elementary principles of the world”, the powers and principalities have deceived the Church to continue gathering for sacralized activities not in accord with “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”<sup>510</sup> rather than gathering to discuss and implement the affairs of the Kingdom of God, which is the nature, calling and purpose of the Ecclesia Jesus is building.

Again, I want to be clear, it is not the activities themselves which are problematic, it is the prescribing of those activities as being “normative”, separated, set apart, specified, humanly organized, and programmed which violates the essence of the New Covenant by:

- ignoring the Holy Spirit
- promoting a ministry “of the letter” rather than “of the Spirit”
- keeping Christians serving under the shadow of the Old Covenant
- and keeping gatherings of the Church (Ecclesia) preoccupied with

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<sup>508</sup> Galatians 4:1-10; Colossians 2:8-23

<sup>509</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:5; Ephesians 6:12

<sup>510</sup> Romans 8:2; 2 Corinthians 3:6



ritual routine rather than the affairs of the Kingdom of God.

I believe that in God's eyes this is nothing less than **idolatry**<sup>511</sup> in that we insist on putting humanly created things in the place that belongs only to God and putting humanly organized things in the place of the life organism of the Holy Spirit. This contradicts the Word of God and grieves the Spirit of God. It is antichrist in that, in practice, it denies Jesus as the Author and Perfecter of the New Covenant. The most insidious thing is - we ask God to accept and bless these practices which actually arise from our fallen human nature and have been instigated by "*world forces of darkness*"<sup>512</sup>.

### New Testament Sacramentalism:

*Prescribing special gatherings,  
in special places, at special times ...*

The idea of focusing on the presence and movement of God's Spirit being relegated mainly to the "sanctuary" (holy place) and places which have been separated and set apart from everyday day life as designated places of "worship" is based squarely in the Old Covenant. Scheduling specified times like feast days and Sundays and Wednesday evenings for programmed times of "worship" is also a practice based in the Old Covenant. In the New Covenant God is present and moving in the hearts and lives of His people every day, all day.<sup>513</sup>

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<sup>511</sup> Cf. Amos 5:21

<sup>512</sup> Ephesians 6:12

<sup>513</sup> Cf. John 3:8; John 4:21-24

To say there are “special” places and times for the presence and moving of God’s Spirit clearly defies the New Covenant, replacing “*the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*” with “special” religious activities. This human systematizing, ordering, and programming of activities for the worship life of the church is one of the main examples of “*the elementary principles of the world*” which are instigated by “*world forces of darkness*” that are operating in the professing churches. The idea that such services are “sanctified” simply because we are Christians gathering in the name of the Lord in places we have identified with His name is actually at the heart of the deception of these “*world forces of darkness*”. Am I implying that demonic beings are present in the “worship services” of the professing churches? From my experience, I would say sometimes they are, and more often they’re not. Also, from my experience, I know that, if He wants to, God is perfectly capable of “*preparing a table before me in the presence of my enemies*”<sup>514</sup>. But that is not the point I am making about the instigation of these “*elementary principles of the world*”. The point is: How does God want to be worshiped in the New Covenant? New Covenant worship is not to be influenced by “*world forces of darkness*”, but through the agency of Jesus Christ.<sup>515</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> Psalm 23:5

<sup>515</sup> Hebrews 13:15. “Through Jesus ... “ Greek: *dia*, Strong’s # 1223, “A primary preposition denoting the *channel* of an act; *through*.”

*“And coming to Him as to a living stone which ... is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”<sup>516</sup>*

If clearly understood, the implications of moving beyond separated, set apart, specified places and times and humanly organized, programmed activities will be extremely radical – that is, a *“laying of the axe at the root”*<sup>517</sup> of these conventional worship praxes.

“The manifold wisdom of God - made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities”

**What’s the harm?** If we continue practicing under the shadow of the Old Covenant, a veil remains over our hearts, and minds, and eyes:

*“... for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant, **the same veil remains, it not being revealed that it is done away with in Christ.**”<sup>518</sup>*

Jesus established the New Covenant more than 2000 years ago, yet, I believe, it has not yet been sufficiently manifest in and through us. Isn’t this exactly what the powers of darkness would want to hinder through keeping us in bondage to *“the elementary principles of the world”*? They know the Father and the Son covenanted something glorious by the Eternal Spirit,

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<sup>516</sup> 1 Peter 2:4-5

<sup>517</sup> Our English word, radical, comes from the Latin word, radix, which means root.

<sup>518</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:14 Alternate reading, NASB.

although the powers themselves do not understand the *“the mystery which for the ages has been hidden in God (that) might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*<sup>519</sup>

**What is that “manifold wisdom”?** It is a *“... wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; <sup>7</sup>but God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; <sup>8</sup>the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; <sup>9</sup>but just as it is written, “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him.”*<sup>520</sup>

The manifestation of this wisdom exceeds what we can think or imagine, but it can be revealed to us and through us by the Spirit<sup>521</sup>, if we will come before the Lord and allow the Spirit to remove the veil.

### “A Change is Gonna Come”

Actually, it has already come – we just need to walk into it. Here is just one insight into walking in the New Covenant: The writer to the Hebrews is distinguishing between Moses and Christ, between the tribe of Levi and the tribe of Judah, between the priesthood order of Levi and the priesthood

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<sup>519</sup> Ephesians 3:9-11

<sup>520</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:6-9

<sup>521</sup> Cf. Ephesians 3:20-21

order of Melchizedek, between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, and he writes of A CHANGE:

*“For when **the priesthood is changed**, of necessity there takes place **a change of law** also.... not on the basis of a law<sup>522</sup> of physical<sup>523</sup> requirement<sup>524</sup>, but according to the power of an endless<sup>525</sup> life.”<sup>526</sup>*

Allow me to offer a paraphrase based on some insights from W.E. Vine<sup>527</sup>:

*“When the priesthood is changed, of necessity the law changes also in this way ... **no longer on the basis of prescribing human prescriptions**, but according to the power of the life of the Eternal One.”*

So here we see that the writer to the Hebrews has the same message as the apostle Paul concerning New Covenant worship in Spirit and Truth: *“not according to the letter, but according to the Spirit”*.<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> The word translated “law” is (Greek) nomos, Strong’s # 3551, indicates “prescriptive usage”.

<sup>523</sup> The word translated “physical” is (Greek) sarkeekos, Strong’s # 4561, indicates also “temporal”.

<sup>524</sup> The word translated “requirement” is (Greek) entole, Strong’s # 1785, indicates an “authoritative prescription”.

<sup>525</sup> The word translated “endless” is (Greek) akatalutos, Strong’s # 179, indicates an “indestructible, permanent”.

<sup>526</sup> Hebrews 7:12 & 16, Context: vv. 11-17.

<sup>527</sup> *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*

<sup>528</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:6

# Addendum

## On Sacramentalism & The New Covenant

*Concerning  
“The Lord’s Supper” and “The Passover Meal”  
“Breaking Bread”, “The Love-Feast”, “The Eucharist”  
and “Baptism”*

An excerpt from  
”The Papal<sup>529</sup> and Hierarchical System  
Compared with the Religion of the New Testament”  
by Joseph John Gurney<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> Although the word “Papal” appears in the title, the content of this writing very much applies to the Protestant traditions as well.

<sup>530</sup> 2nd Edition (1843) pp. 132-151. I would like to thank Paul Rapoza for drawing my attention to Gurney’s writings. Paul also provided the text of this public domain work on his website, Helps Communications ministry: <https://www.helps7.com>  
Paul also hosts a site called, “A Restoration Digital Materials Library”: <https://usr.helps7.com/RL/>

## “The Lord’s Supper”

And now we must advance to the one remaining practice of professing Christians, which is not only regarded both by many Protestants as well as by the Roman Catholics, as a sacrament, but is looked upon as sacred above all other ceremonies of the church, and is often spoken of par excellence, as the sacrament. Unwilling as I am to run counter to any habitual feelings of reverence in my fellow Christians, truth compels me to confess my own judgment, that this ceremony also, according to Hooker's definition of the term,<sup>531</sup> is destitute of any claim to such a title.

## “The Passover Meal”

There can be no doubt that this custom was observed by the Lord Jesus and his disciples, as by other Jews, when they partook of their daily social meals; and we have a distinct account of their doing so, at the last paschal supper, which they ate together, for the sustenance of the body, as well as in obedience to the law of God on this particular subject. It was, however, a most touching and solemn occasion. The lamb of the Passover was an expressive type of Jesus himself the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world; and the hour was now at hand when he was to be offered up on the cross, as a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of all mankind. No wonder that at such a time he saw meet to give to customs, otherwise familiar, a religious direction; to speak of the bread which he was breaking, as a symbol of his own body, so soon to be broken; and of the cup of wine which he handed to his friends, as a token of his own blood which was now about to be shed. No wonder that he should command his immediate followers, when they observed these customs, (whether at the feast of the

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<sup>531</sup> As defined by the 16th-century Anglican theologian, Richard Hooker, the sacraments are said to be "visible signs of invisible grace"; similarly, the Catechism of the 1662 version states that a sacrament is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given to us, ordained by Christ himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof."

Passover, or on other more common occasions,) to do so in remembrance of Him. "Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me," and again, "This cup is the New Testament in my blood: this do, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me."

### "Breaking Bread"

It was a common custom among the Jews, at their suppers or dinners, to break their loaf of bread in order to distribute it among the company, and to take this opportunity of returning thanks to that gracious Being who so bountifully supplied all their need. The cup of wine also was handed round the table, to be drunk of by each individual, for the refreshment of the body, yet in token, probably, of social and religious fellowship.<sup>532</sup>

We find that the primitive disciples were careful even at their social meals, to keep the Lord, who died for them, always in remembrance. These believers had all things in common; and "continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart:" Acts ii. 46. It was at their daily meals that they broke their bread; and then, doubtless, that they called to mind that sacred body which the bread symbolized, and which had been broken for the salvation of their souls.

### "The Love-Feast"

After a little time, however, when the number of Christians became larger, and churches were formed in various parts of the world, the daily

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<sup>532</sup> I would like to add this insight from Paul Rapoza of Helps Communications ministry: <https://www.helps7.com> and "A Restoration Digital Materials Library": <https://usr.helps7.com/RL/> "That meal in the breaking of the bread together was a very unifying thing among the Hebrews. They were all partaking of that ONE loaf - one nation. A Jew would never ever consider sharing that meal with a non-Jew. It was inconceivable. The focus (unlike our modern communions) was not on the partaking of the individual pieces broken off the loaf but partaking of the one loaf itself."



social meal was, naturally enough, exchanged for the weekly love-feast a moderate repast, of which the believers in each place partook together, in token of their mutual good will and religious fellowship.

It appears that these repasts were held on the first day of the week; but separately from their meetings for worship. Paul and his companions partook of the love-feast, on that day, at Troas, where the disciples "had come together to break bread;" and when "he had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, so he departed:" Acts xx. 7, 11. So at the close of the first century, we find from Pliny's celebrated letter to the emperor Trajan, that the Bithynian Christians met, early in the morning, on a stated (doubtless the first) day of the week, for the purpose of worshipping Christ; and at a later hour of the same day, assembled again in order to partake of a moderate social meal. This was evidently the love-feast, when the bread was eaten and the wine drunk, in commemoration of the death of Jesus the crucified, but now living and reigning Saviour.

### "The Eucharist"

Tertullian, at the end of the second century, speaks of the celebration of the eucharist, in connexion with the meals of the Christians in tempore victus; but it was at a somewhat earlier date, as we learn from a well-known passage in the works of Justin Martyr, (A. D. 147,) that the practice in question had assumed the form, in some parts of the church, of a directly ceremonial observance.

The morsel of bread was then eaten, and the wine tasted by the believers, at the close of their assemblies for worship not for the satisfaction of any bodily want, but simply as a religious rite. Everyone knows that this is the character of the Lord's supper, as it is now used among Christians. It has become a purely ceremonial act, and is regarded, especially among Roman Catholics, as the most solemn part or article in the public worship of God. Under this new character, it seems directly to interfere with the general law,

that under the gospel dispensation, God is to be worshipped spiritually that all type and figures in the worship of the Most High, are now exchanged for the eternal reality and substance of religion that they are at once fulfilled and abolished by the coming in the flesh, and propitiatory death, of the Son of God.

### **“The Lord’s Supper” is not a Sacrament**

In the meantime, whether we look at the practice of the early Christians, or that which has prevailed among the professors of the truth, in modern days, we are left without the shadow of an evidence, that the participation of bread and wine, in the Lord's supper, is a sacrament i.e., an outward observance, properly containing an interior grace.

In order to render this point clear, we must advert first to the Roman Catholic, and secondly to the Protestant view of this subject.

The inherent mystery, which the advocates of Rome ascribed to the bread and wine, is an actual bodily participation of that which the bread and wine symbolize, even the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. They strangely imagine, that after the consecration, by a priest, of the wafer and the wine, these substances are miraculously converted into that body and blood, which are truly and substantially eaten and drunk by those who partake of the sacred elements; and they further allege, that this corporeal eating of Christ's body, conveys with it a spiritual blessing to the soul, and is one appointed and necessary means of man's salvation.

These preposterous notions have, in my judgment, no other origin than the direful superstition, which, not very long after the times of the apostles, began to brood like a cloud over the professing church of Christ, and involved it by degrees in gross and perilous darkness. Yet the Romish church pleads, as authority for transubstantiation, the words of Jesus, when he brake the loaf and distributed it to his disciples "This is my body which is broken for you." The question then lies in the meaning of these words. Now

there is a clear and all-sufficient reason why our Lord cannot be understood as declaring that the bread which he had broken, was actually his body namely, that his body was then a living frame, not yet broken a veritable body which his disciples saw and handled, and which was occupying a portion of space, distinct from that which the bread occupied, while the very words which form the subject of dispute were flowing from its lips. Christianity most justly requires us to believe many mysterious truths which are beyond reason; but it never yet claimed our faith in that which is contrary to reason. It was indeed attested by many miracles' suspensions and counteractions of the established order of nature; but here there is supposed, not merely a miracle, but an actual, physical impossibility. The same body or substance cannot possibly exist in two places at once. To suppose the contrary, is to suppose an absolute absurdity that which never was, is not, and never can be.

Nor is the case at all different in the present day. We may rest assured that the glorified body of Christ is in heaven a place of infinite enjoyment and glory. It is not possible that it should at the same time be in the hands of the priest on earth, whether in the form of a wafer, or under any other appearance much less in the hands of a thousand priests at once, in a thousand different places.

That our text does not afford any reasonable pretext for the fabrication of so enormous a fiction, a little calm consideration may be sufficient to evince. It is surely matter of common parlance to use the verb to be, in the sense of figuring or representing; as for example, anyone might say, when looking at figures in a picture representing Christ and the apostle Paul, That is the Saviour! that is Paul! We ought moreover to remember that our Lord spoke, as there is every reason to believe, in the vernacular Syriac, in which language the verb in the sentence "This is my body," would not have been expressed at all as the reader may satisfy himself by a reference to the old Syriac version of the New Testament. "This my body" said our blessed Lord as he held the bread in his hands; words which may, with perfect propriety,

be understood as conveying the idea that the bread symbolized or represented his body.

As the corporeal eating of the body of Christ must therefore be regarded as fictitious, it would be irrelevant to argue the second question, whether such an eating conveys grace to the soul. That which has no existence, can have no effects. But in the notion that the body of Christ is actually eaten in the consecrated wafer, and that this carnal act is necessary to salvation, there is surely much that degrades the cause of truth; much that directs the mind of those who are honestly seeking their salvation, into wrong channels; much that is calculated to divert from a simple reliance on the crucified, risen, and reigning Saviour, and to substitute for him an idol of man's own imagining. How many poor bewildered sinners have been taught, on their death beds, to regard this ceremony, with its supposed hidden mystery, as their viaticum to heaven, instead of casting themselves, in deep repentance and lively faith, on Him who died for them; and through whose blood and righteousness alone, we can enter the portals of heaven, and take possession of the inheritance of the saints in light. In so corrupt a superstition, so gross a perversion of the great realities of the gospel, there can surely be no inherent grace, but rather loss, and danger, and sometimes perhaps even death, to the immortal spirit.

How then, in the second place, does this matter stand with those Protestants, who while they reject the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation, and regard it as utterly unreasonable, nevertheless practice the eucharist as a ceremony in divine worship, and under the notion that it contains, within itself, some mysterious power for the benefit of souls? Is such a notion founded on Scripture? — or is it justified by experience? I apprehend that both these questions must be answered in the negative. The precept of Christ, to which Protestants as well as Papists refer as their authority for the rite, makes mention of the breaking of the bread and the handing of the cup, only as a memorial "Do it in remembrance of me." Accordingly, we find that the early Christians, without the slightest

view (as far as appears) to any internal mystery, applied that practice to the purpose of commemoration. This commemoration might be blessed to the souls of the right-minded, who truly desired to keep their Lord in remembrance; — but we have no reason to suppose that there was any peculiar inward grace connected with it, any more than with other acts of Christian piety. The true feeding on the body and blood of Christ by a living faith, might or might not accompany the practice in question; and certainly, this feeding might take place at other seasons when the outward symbol was far removed from the Christian believer. Now if there was no inward grace inherent in the practice, and inseparable from it when honestly performed, that practice was no sacrament.

Much less can it be regarded in that point of view, in its present form, as a ceremony in the worship of God. That this ceremony may be overruled, as a solemn remembrancer, to the benefit of some minds, I am by no means disposed to dispute; but such an effect affords no evidence that there is a mystical interior attached to the rite, and properly contained in it; and this could alone render it a sacrament. On the other hand, there is surely a danger lest the rite in question should operate unfavourably, especially in those persons who have the strongest sense of devotion and mystery attached to it. To them it may often prove a diversion from the very truth; a substitution of the lifeless form for the sacred reality - a miserable exchange of Christ himself, for a favourite symbol or shadow.

It is a singular confirmation of these remarks that many of the clergy, in the present day, have departed from their former simplicity in this matter, and are now laying an almost popish stress on the ceremony of the eucharist, have at the same time divested their discourses, to the people, of the cardinal doctrine of Christ crucified. Thus, while the symbol of the Saviour who died for us, is inordinately cherished, the Saviour himself, and his most precious atoning sacrifice, are made to retreat within the vail of awful concealment — perhaps of absolute oblivion.

## “The Lord’s Supper” and “Baptism” are not Sacraments

It appears then, that whether we allow or disallow the practices of water baptism and the Lord's supper, as they are now used among Christian professors, we are brought to a sound conclusion, that like the ceremonies of the Jewish law, they are destitute of any interior mystery or grace, by which the soul can be affected; and can be regarded only as shadows or representations of those divine mysteries which truly belong to the plan of our redemption, and are absolutely necessary to salvation.

Now it is on all hands acknowledged, that had such mysteries been inherent in the rites of baptism and the eucharist, they would have imparted to these ceremonies the true character of sacraments. On the logical principle therefore already alluded to *Quo quidvis tale fit, id magis tale* (that by which anything becomes such, is itself more such) we cannot refuse to allow that these blessed realities are themselves sacraments indeed. Yes, Christianity has her sacraments in very truth not any outward form affecting the bodies of men but a spiritual baptism, and a spiritual supper. Both these are clearly introduced to our notice, and strongly insisted on as of vital importance, by our Lord himself and his apostles.

### “Baptism”

First, as to spiritual baptism; it is divine in its character, proceeding not by any natural law, but immediately and supernaturally, from that God who is a Spirit. It is that sovereign work of grace, by which the dark, dead, sinful soul of man is enlightened, quickened, and converted to God; so as to be translated into the kingdom of Christ even in this world, and to become a partaker of the divine nature, by a new creation.

Sometimes it is described as a new birth — as in John i. 12, 13: "As many as received him, to them gave the power to become the sons of God, which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God:" and still more at large by our Saviour himself in John iii. 3-8:

"Except a man be born again, i. e. as in the margin, from above he cannot see the kingdom of God . . . Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The latter of these clauses is an enlarged repetition, or paraphrase of the former. To be born of water and the Spirit, and to be born from above, are synonymous terms. Hence it is clear, that the substantive water is here used, as in many other passages of Scripture, figuratively to denote the cleansing influence of the Spirit, which " comes from above;" so that " water and the Spirit" must here be regarded as expressing only the Holy Spirit and his divine influence. This view is confirmed by the immediate context in the verses which follow, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto you, Ye must be born again (or from above.) The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

This divine work is described by the apostle Paul as a washing: see 1 Cor. vi. 9 11. "Be ye not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, &c. &c. shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you, but ye are washed" &c. Again Eph. v. 25, 26: "Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." Here the word, even the preaching of the gospel, is set forth as the appointed means by which Christ washes or baptizes his church a doctrine which proves that a truly anointed minister of the Lord Jesus may, through the power of his ever-present helper, thus baptize his hearers into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. But this is a work which the Lord is sometimes pleased to effect without the intervention of any human instrumentality, as was the case with Paul himself. The marvelous change of heart, which he had experienced, is elsewhere described by the apostle, under the same figure: see Tit. iii. 3 6, "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy,

hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared; not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Like the water and the Spirit in John iii. the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, may be regarded as perfectly identical. These terms appear to set forth one blessed and necessary work, even the baptism of Christ, the baptism of the Spirit.

Under the gospel dispensation, Jesus Christ is the true Baptizer. "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance," said John the Baptist, "but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:" Matt. iii. 11. In the gospel of John, the Holy Ghost alone is mentioned. As for the fire, like the water in John iii. it may here stand for that divine influence, by which the soul of the believer is purified, and his very heart changed within him. When this baptism is experienced, he puts off "the old man, who is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts," and puts on "the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

Lastly, that quickening, cleansing work, by which the needful change is effected in us, from death to life, and from sin to righteousness, is the baptism which saves, mentioned by the apostle Peter. After speaking of the ark "wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water," the apostle adds, "The like figure whereunto (or that which answereth whereunto doth also now save us; not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is gone into heaven; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him:" 1 Pet. iii. 21, 22. The risen and ascended Saviour baptizes from above. He sends forth that living influence of the Holy Ghost, by which sinful man is enabled savingly to believe in his atoning sacrifice, and to bring forth the fruits of righteousness. Thus, are we made partakers



of a conscience void of offence in the sight of God and man: comp. Heb. ix. 14.

There is surely much reason to believe that Paul is speaking of this powerful internal work, when he insists on the necessity of dying unto sin, and of rising again with Christ, unto a life of righteousness. "What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life:" Rom. vi. 1 4. And again, to the Colossians, "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein ye also are risen with him, THROUGH THE FAITH OF THE OPERATION OF GOD, who hath raised him from the dead:" Col. ii. 10-12.

So also when he assures us that there is "one body and one Spirit, even as we are called by one hope of our calling; one Lord (Jesus Christ), one faith, one baptism" we may fairly conclude, either that "baptism" here takes the sense of "doctrine," of which (as before-mentioned) it is evidently capable; or that the apostle is speaking of the one baptism of the one Lord, which is with the Holy Ghost. This view of his meaning is perfectly accordant with another passage, in which he speaks of this spiritual baptism as the means of introduction to a living membership in the body or church of Christ: see 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also, is Christ. For by ONE SPIRIT we are all baptized into one body; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Happy and holy are they who drink at this sacred fountain; forever blessed they, who submit to the baptizing and renovating

power of the Holy Ghost. All these, and these only, are living members of the body of Christ, children of grace, and heirs of glory.

### "The Lord's Supper"

But secondly, if the sacrament of regeneration is at once the only and the sufficient means of bringing us into union with Christ our Head, and with all his members the world over, and if imparting to us the principles of a new and heavenly life, that union and that life can be maintained only by our participation (may I not say our daily participation?) in another sacrament, even the spiritual supper of our Lord. "Behold," says Jesus to the churches, "I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me:" Rev. iii. 20. This cheering promise is in exact accordance with some very remarkable expressions which our Lord uttered after he had broken the bread and handed the wine, at the last paschal supper. "But I say unto you, that I will not henceforth drink of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom:" Matt. xxvi. 29. On another occasion he said to his disciples, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom," etc.: Luke xxii. 28 30. Nor can it be denied, that it is the same gracious Saviour who, in the prophetic language of the Song of songs, thus addressed his spouse, the church "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, beloved:" Cant. v. 1.

I should suppose that no evangelical Christian, of whatsoever peculiar name, could for a moment hesitate in accepting these beautiful passages in a purely spiritual sense, as representing the communion which true believers in Jesus, in times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, are permitted

to enjoy with their holy Head, and one with another in Him; a communion which, from season to season, cheers them on their journey to the promised land, and will constitute their chiefest joy in heaven itself. Here is sustenance for the inmost soul! here is the saving supper of the Lord!

But Christ himself is the food of the Christian and is to be eaten by his disciples in this true sacrament. Nothing can be more affecting, and nothing more important, than his own doctrine on this subject, contained in that memorable discourse which the apostle John has placed on record with the pen of inspiration: see John vi. 35 63. "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE: he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.... I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead; this is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews, therefore, strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so, he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live forever. These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is a hard saying, who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? IT is THE SPIRIT THAT QUICKENETH, THE

FLESH PROFITETH NOTHING: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

The declaration with which our Lord here concludes his discourse, is of incalculable weight and importance. It seems to me virtually to undermine and abrogate forever all typical and carnal ceremonies in divine worship. Most assuredly it affords the true key to the preceding doctrine. We have our Lord's own explicit authority for understanding it spiritually. Those who under the immediate influence of the Spirit, and by a living faith, appropriate the glorious Saviour who came down from heaven that he might give life to the world, truly feed on Jesus, the bread of God, the bread of life. The Christian, whose sole reliance is placed on the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, and who lives by that precious faith, may justly be said to eat the flesh of the Son of man, and to drink his blood. There is indeed no spiritual life for any man, to whom the gospel is preached, on any other terms; and all who, under the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, thus believe with the heart, are nourished up by this heavenly food to all eternity. They dwell in Christ, and Christ dwells in them. Furthermore, when the believers in Jesus are assembled and united in solemn worship when they draw near to the Father, in one Spirit, through the Son of his love when they are livingly brought to the remembrance of the body which was broken, and of the blood which was shed for them — when "the love of God" is "shed abroad" in their hearts "by the Holy Ghost which he giveth us" then are they rich partakers of a true sacramental communion — then are they honoured guests, even here, at the TABLE OF THE LORD, in his kingdom.

# 7. “I Have Given You as a Covenant”

Isaiah 42:6

## Christ, The Pattern of the New Covenant

### Introduction<sup>533</sup>

In the previous article, I made a case for coming out from under “*the elementary principles of the world*” which instigate the prescribing of special religious activities which have been separated from the whole of life, and scheduled to take place in specified places, at specified times, and are humanly structured and organized. In other words, a case for moving beyond conventional worship praxes.

I also attempted to demonstrate that the “pattern” for the New Testament cannot be determined via the “Descriptive/Prescriptive Paradigm”. But rather, in a manner of speaking, that which is “descriptive” of Christ is “prescriptive” for the New Covenant. Thus, Christ Himself is the Pattern of the New Covenant.

For those of us who are convinced of such things, or are at least open to seriously considering the validity of such an approach to a life of worship, may find questions like these set before us:

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<sup>533</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible. All comments in reference to the meanings of Greek words are based upon notes in *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* by W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* by Stephen D. Renn, *Word Studies in the New Testament* by M.R. Vincent, and *Word Pictures in the New Testament* by A.T. Robertson.

## What lies behind the veil?

If we are willing to allow the Spirit of Christ to remove the veil<sup>534</sup> which has kept us under the shadow of the Old Covenant, what will we find behind the veil? That fact of the matter is: You will find whatever it is that you want to find. The question is: What is the desire of your heart - Christ Himself, or some new and different spiritual things?

When we leave the humanly structured and organized church worship programs behind, I would say almost always it feels like one is in a spiritual **WILDERNESS**. Having left “Christian City” with its full-orbed program of religious activities, there seems to be a stark “just you and Jesus” environment, which is actually by God’s design.<sup>535</sup> But one wonders, “What will I find out here in the **wilderness** that is to replace all those religious activities?” Again, you will find whatever it is you are looking for – whatever is your heart’s desire – either Christ Himself, or just some new and different spiritual things. About 30 years ago I wrote a piece entitled *Church in the Wilderness*. It could just as well be titled “**Church Beyond the Veil**”:

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<sup>534</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:14-16

<sup>535</sup> I have teaching notes to a message I have given many times in the past, “*The Woman, the Well, and the Wilderness*”, which contains many insights into God working in our hearts and lives “in the wilderness”. A complimentary copy of the notes can be obtained by emailing: [AtChristTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristTable@gmail.com)



# Church in the Wilderness



**"But what did you go out into the wilderness to see?"<sup>536</sup>**

God has a purpose  
in the wilderness.

He wants His people to SEE

- "Something Better".<sup>537</sup>

People see what they want to see

- usually quail.<sup>538</sup>

**"But what did you go out into the wilderness to see?"**

Our father of faith "obeyed to GO OUT  
as a sojourner in the land of promise".<sup>539</sup>

It takes faith to see your way through the wilderness.

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<sup>536</sup> Matthew 11:7; Luke 7:24.

<sup>537</sup> Viz. JESUS. The basic theme of the Book of Hebrews is found in the word "better," in describing the superiority of Christ in both His person and His work. Christ provides: • Better revelation. 1:1-2 • Better expectation. 6:9 • Better priesthood. 7:7-11, 20-28 • Better hope. 7:19 • Better testament, covenant. 7:22, 8:6 • Better promises. 8:6 • Better sacrifices. 8:6 • Better possessions. 10:34 • Better country. 11:16 • Better resurrection. 11:35 • Better things. 11:40; 12:24

<sup>538</sup> Exodus 16; Numbers 11.

<sup>539</sup> Hebrews 11:9

In the Wilderness of Sin<sup>540</sup> -  
"Moses saw Him who is invisible".<sup>541</sup>

In the wilderness of Ziph<sup>542</sup> -  
those who were "in distress, in debt and discontented"  
saw the difference between Saul and David<sup>543</sup> -  
"The Glory of Israel".<sup>544</sup>

In the Wilderness of the People<sup>545</sup> -  
a remnant saw the restoration of  
"The city which has foundations,  
whose architect and builder is God".<sup>546</sup>

In the Wilderness of Judea<sup>547</sup> -  
many heard the crying, WENT OUT,  
and saw one decrease and Another increase.<sup>548</sup>

**"But what did you go out into the wilderness to see?"**

God always "makes a way in the wilderness".  
He always "makes rivers in the desert".  
And He always "does a new thing" in the wilderness.<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> Exodus 16-17; Numbers 33-34; Deuteronomy 32:51

<sup>541</sup> Hebrews 11:27

<sup>542</sup> 1 Samuel 23:14; 26:1-2

<sup>543</sup> 1 Samuel 22:1-2; 23:13; 1 Chronicles 11:15

<sup>544</sup> Micah 1:15

<sup>545</sup> Ezekiel 20:35 Or the wilderness of the "tribe", or "flock", or "congregation".

<sup>546</sup> Hebrews 11:10

<sup>547</sup> Matthew 3:1-3

<sup>548</sup> John 3:30

<sup>549</sup> Isaiah 43:19



Yes, when Gomer was allured into the Wilderness of Trouble<sup>550</sup>, she learned to sing a song of Hope to her Husband and was betrothed to Him forever in faithfulness.<sup>551</sup>

So, you have to **GO OUT** into the wilderness in order to **SEE**.  
But one of two things will happen:  
You will either **SEE JESUS**,  
or you will die of leanness, rebellion, or idolatry.

**"But what did you go out into the wilderness to see?"**



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<sup>550</sup> Hosea 2:14-15 Viz. "Achor" which means "Trouble".

<sup>551</sup> Hosea 2:19-20

# “We would see Jesus”

John 12:21

*“Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith ...”<sup>552</sup>*

So, what do you hope to find beyond the veil? Maybe more authentic and intimate relationships in the Body? Or more freedom to minister your spiritual gifts to the Body? Or a new way of “doing church” (which is actually old)? Or is it more of Christ Himself?

Those of us who are of the “Organic”/“Simple”/“House” church persuasion are predisposed to say that what lies “beyond the veil” is this new (old) way of “doing church”, namely Body ministry ala 1 Corinthians 14:26.

Consequently, there is much talk about “the Body” and “One Anothering”<sup>553</sup>.

But the reality is this: Christ is pre-requisite for Church. Without sufficient revelation of the mystery of Christ, and without vital relationship with Christ, and without authentic reflection of the character of Christ (all the stuff of the New Covenant), we have merely *“a form of religion, contradicting its own spirituality”*<sup>554</sup> - that is, worship praxes which continue to “miss the mark” and fall short of the glory of God’s Pattern, which is Christ Himself. The apostle Paul spoke of being able to *“discern the Body”*.<sup>555</sup> Pre-requisite to

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<sup>552</sup> Hebrews 12:2

<sup>553</sup> i.e. Loving one another and building up the Body through the practice of the 58 New Testament injunctions of how to relate to one another in the Body of Christ.

<sup>554</sup> 2 Timothy 3:5 NASB: “holding to a form of religion, although denying its power”

<sup>555</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:29

“discerning the Body” is to be able to “**DISCERN THE HEAD**”.<sup>556</sup> Without sufficient revelation of Christ, we will – once again – end up with a body which is not His. **Christ builds His Church by revelation of Himself.**<sup>557</sup> Personally, I am no longer interested in investing into a group of people who are not interested in “*pressing on to know the Lord*”<sup>558</sup> by intentional pursuit of revelation of Christ in the scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>559</sup>

Yes, Christ is the Pattern for the His Church<sup>560</sup>, and we are to “*build according to the pattern*”,<sup>561</sup> but Christ is also the Pattern for the Kingdom, as well. Peter’s revelation was primarily of the King of the Kingdom.<sup>562</sup> The Church is a witness to the Kingdom, but it is the Kingdom which creates the Church, not the other way around.<sup>563</sup> This is why the “Great

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<sup>556</sup> Cf. my eBook, *Christ is Pre-requisite for Church*. Request a complimentary copy by emailing [AtChristsTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristsTable@gmail.com)

<sup>557</sup> Matthew 16:15-18

<sup>558</sup> Hosea 6:3

<sup>559</sup> John 5:39-40; 15:26. Cf. my pamphlet, “*Doing Church*”. To request a complimentary copy, Email: [AtChristsTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristsTable@gmail.com)

<sup>560</sup> Cf. my booklets, “*Apostolic Teaching*”, “*The Foundation of the Church*”, “*Foundation Stones*”, “*Discipleship & The Equipping Ministries*”. (Request complimentary copies by writing to: [AtChristsTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristsTable@gmail.com))

<sup>561</sup> Moses: Exodus 25:8-9, 40; 26:30; Numbers 8:4; Acts 7:44; Hebrews 8:5. David & Solomon: 1 Chronicles 28:19. Ezekiel 41:17; 43:10-11. Paul: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

<sup>562</sup> “The Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:18) was A CRUCIFIED CHRIST. This is what the Jews missed. We cannot afford to miss it. D.A. Carson has said that the epitome of God’s wrath and love were expressed at the Cross. Wrath poured out on sin, not people. Love not expressed through joy, but through suffering. The apostle Paul identified “the wisdom of God” as both Christ and the “word of the Cross”. This is the very wisdom God intends to “make know through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”. (Ephesians 3:10) – Christ and the “word of the Cross” – the Crucified Christ. Cf. My booklets “The Cross & The Powers of Darkness” and “Seeing the Kingdom Through the Cross”. (Request complimentary copies by writing to: [AtChristsTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristsTable@gmail.com))

<sup>563</sup> Observe the sequence in Matthew 16:15-19: The revelation of the King and the Kingdom precedes and becomes the bedrock of the Church.

Commission” was to “make disciples” “of the kingdom”,<sup>564</sup> not to plant churches. If we continue to focus on the church rather than the kingdom, we will continue having a plethora of “Christian clubs” and a dearth of authentic disciples of Christ.<sup>565</sup>

Likewise, the Pattern for the New Covenant is not a set of prescriptions (“letters”) which would define the covenant and its terms of operation. The reason this is so is because Jesus Christ IS the New Covenant, in the sense that He Himself is the sum of all the elements of the covenant. Specifically: He is the blood sacrifice; He is the High Priest who offers the sacrifice; it is His blood which “cuts” the covenant; it is His death which inaugurates the covenant; He is the Mediator of the covenant; He is the Advocate who declares the terms of the covenant. The covenant is in operation in, and by, and through Christ.

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<sup>564</sup> Matthew 13:52; 28:20

<sup>565</sup> I realize that in this last paragraph I made a number of statements, each needing an article for further development.

# The Eternal Gospel & Eternal Covenant

*“I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations.”<sup>566</sup>*

Isaiah 42:6

In the midst of this Messianic prophecy in Isaiah,<sup>567</sup> we see disclosed the fact that the Father has given Jesus Christ as a covenant – specifically, Jesus Christ personified (incarnated) the New Covenant.

As with the Old Covenant, the New Covenant is between God and His people – i.e., between God and human beings. But there is a defining difference in the New Covenant: It is a covenant between God and human beings, only because Christ, the Word, became a human being<sup>568</sup>. When fallen human beings are regenerated and baptized into Christ, they are then (and only then) members of God’s people – *“the Church, which is His Body”*<sup>569</sup>, those who *“belong to Christ”* and are *“in Christ”*, and therefore, are included in the covenant. But, in fact, God did not make the covenant with us – He made the covenant with Himself, in a manner of speaking. In another manner of speaking (in a trinitarian manner) God made the covenant with Christ. This covenant was made before the foundation of the world - before the creation of Humanity; before Humanity’s fall into sin; before the Incarnation of Christ, the Redeemer; before the Cross, before the

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<sup>566</sup> Revised Standard Version

<sup>567</sup> Isaiah 42:1-7

<sup>568</sup> John 1:14

<sup>569</sup> Colossians 1:18, 24; Ephesians 5:23, 29; Cf. Ephesians 1:22; 4:12, 15.

Resurrection and Ascension. The covenant was made before the foundation of the world because, this Lamb of God, unblemished and spotless, was “*known before the foundation of the world*”<sup>570</sup>. Yes, the scriptures say that at the foundation of the world, this Lamb of God had already been slain.<sup>571</sup> This is obviously in a spiritual sense – meaning that God and Christ had made this covenant in eternity past.

*“And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach....”*<sup>572</sup> If you were aware of that verse in Revelation 14:6, have you ever wondered what the “*eternal gospel*” was? It is eternal good news. Good news that is not limited to time. Good news which didn’t start in time and won’t end with time. It’s good news about something which will last for eternity future. But it is also good news about what happened in eternity past. It is the good news about the covenant which was cut in eternity past – inaugurated upon Jesus’ death on the Cross – but cut in eternity past. What is called “the New Covenant” is also an Eternal Covenant.<sup>573</sup>

Let’s take another look at **John 17:1-5**. As our High Priest, Jesus prayed these words to the Father - all of which are in reference to the New Covenant – the Eternal Covenant - which He had come to inaugurate:

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<sup>570</sup> 1 Peter 1:19-20

<sup>571</sup> Revelation 13:8

<sup>572</sup> Revelation 14:6

<sup>573</sup> The Lord promised that this New Covenant would be “eternal” (Jeremiah 32:40; Ezekiel 37:26-27), unlike the Old Covenant which He made obsolete (Hebrews 8:13).

<sup>1</sup>*“Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You.”*

Jesus said, *“The hour has come.”* Jesus was about to go to the Cross – the altar upon which the Lamb of God would cut the covenant with the Father. Jesus referred to this self-denying sacrifice of love as **“glory”**. The apostle Paul repeatedly said that the **“glory”** of the New Covenant SURPASSED the **“glory”** of the Old Covenant.<sup>574</sup> That **“glory”** of the New Covenant is the **Crucified Christ - the wisdom and the power of God.**<sup>575</sup> **As we unveil Christ as the Pattern, it is absolutely essential to understand that God’s Christ is a CRUCIFIED Christ, for this is an essential aspect of the Pattern of the New Covenant.**<sup>576</sup>

<sup>2</sup>*“Even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life.”*

**To give eternal life** – this is why Jesus came – this is the purpose of the New Covenant – to give God’s people the life of the Eternal One (zoē).

<sup>3</sup>*“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*

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<sup>574</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:7-11

<sup>575</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:18, 24, Cf. 30; Cf. Ephesians 3:9-11.

<sup>576</sup> The scope of this essay cannot contain a treatment of the Message and the Way of the Cross. But I have written of these things in detail in other essays: *“The Way of the Cross”*, *“Seeing the Kingdom Through the Cross”*, *“Who Is This King of Glory?”*, *“Death Activates Life”*, *“God-Centeredness”*, and *“The Cross & the Powers of Darkness”*. Complimentary copies of these essays can be obtained by Emailing: [AtChristTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristTable@gmail.com)

“Eternal life” is a wonderous subject; but here Jesus summarizes the meaning as KNOWING GOD. This is the purpose of the New Covenant – TO KNOW GOD<sup>577</sup>, which we will shortly discuss in more detail.

<sup>4</sup>*“I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.”*

Jesus had not yet ascended; but in John 17:11 He said, “*I am no longer in the world.*” In the same way, He spoke of His work having been accomplished even though He had not yet been physically crucified, buried, resurrected, and ascended. The work the Father had given Him to do established the New Covenant, which He inaugurated with His blood and His death upon the Cross<sup>578</sup>.

<sup>5</sup>*“Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”*

Again, the New Covenant - between the Father and Christ - was cut before the foundation of the world, in eternity past – therefore, we have an “**eternal gospel**”.<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 8:8-12; Cf. Jeremiah 9:23-24.

<sup>578</sup> Hebrews 9:15-22

<sup>579</sup> F.B. Meyer on Revelation 14:6: “Notice the phrase, the everlasting gospel, Revelation 14:6. In other words, the gospel of the grace of God is no expedient brought in to patch up a program which has been seriously spoiled; it is as old as eternity and brings to men eternal joy, and peace, and hope.”



# Christ, the Pattern

To discern the mystery of Christ more fully, we must have revelation of Him as the Pattern of the New Covenant, because the New Covenant is all about Christ. This is the subject matter of this article.

*“Consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.”<sup>580</sup>*

*“In these last days (God) has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature and upholds all things by the word of His power.”<sup>581</sup>*

*“For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him.”<sup>582</sup>*

*“God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.... For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.”<sup>583</sup>*

**Christ is God’s ALL - He is the Pattern for “the fulness of God”<sup>584</sup>.**

The apostle Paul wrote that in Christ dwells the “fulness”.<sup>585</sup> The “fulness” of what or of whom? Paul explains that it is the “fulness of God”<sup>586</sup> - that is, all

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<sup>580</sup> Hebrews 3:1

<sup>581</sup> Hebrews 1:2-3a

<sup>582</sup> Colossians 1:19

<sup>583</sup> Colossians 2:2b-3, 9

<sup>584</sup> Greek: pleroma, Strong’s # 4138, meaning that which fills to completion, i.e. “all”.

<sup>585</sup> Colossians 1:19

<sup>586</sup> Colossians 2:9

that God is, and all that God says, and all that God does, and all that God has to give. The title (and the theme) of a wonderful little book written by Watchman Nee says it well: *“Christ, the Sum of All Spiritual Things”*. God hasn’t given us a number of spiritual “commodities” – He has given us a **Person**. If you have Christ, you have **all** that God has to give.<sup>587</sup>

Is it possible to summarize all that God has given in Christ? Is it possible to summarize all that Jesus came to give? There are numerous places in the gospels where Jesus announced that He had come for various reasons.<sup>588</sup> Is there one reason that may be the sum of all?

I believe Jesus was summarizing His life and ministry on earth when He was speaking to the Father in what we call His “High Priestly Prayer” in John 17:

*“Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, <sup>2</sup> even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. <sup>3</sup> This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. <sup>4</sup> I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished *the work which You have given Me to do.* <sup>5</sup> Now, Father, glorify*

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<sup>587</sup> On the same theme, I would recommend a great article by A.B. Simpson, *“Himself”*.

<http://www.atchriststable.org/himself.html>

<sup>588</sup> Numerous places in the gospels Jesus announced that He had come for various reasons: “to fulfill the law”, Matthew 5:17; “to bring a sword (of division)”, Matthew 10:34; “to serve”, Mark 10:45; “to start a fire on the earth”, Luke 12:49; “to seek and save the lost”, Luke 19:10; “to do the will of the Father”, John 6:38; “to give light”, John 12:46; “to bear witness to the truth”, John 18:37.

Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

All that the Father and Christ had in their heart and mind for the redemption of Humanity could be summarized as giving (or better, restoring) eternal life. Jesus said: “I came that they may have life and have it fully.”<sup>589</sup> In one of his epistles, the apostle John wrote: “He who has the Son, has the life.”<sup>590</sup> Just as “God is love.”<sup>591</sup>, God is life. Immortality - eternal life - is the life of the Eternal One – without beginning and without end. This kind of life is only available in God,<sup>592</sup> through faith in Christ. This life is inseparable from God, meaning it is not a “spiritual commodity”; it is the Person of Christ Himself. “He who has<sup>593</sup> the Son, has the life.”<sup>594</sup>

Jesus defined this “**eternal life**” as “*knowing*<sup>595</sup> *the only true God and Jesus Christ*”. Indeed, Jesus explained that knowing Him was knowing the Father, for He had come to reveal the Father.<sup>596</sup> Jesus is our Pattern for knowing God, and therefore the Pattern of the New Covenant. What would help that last statement be more convincing? Firstly, a brief

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<sup>589</sup> John 10:10b. “life”: Not “*bios*”, Strong’s #979, biological life; but “*zoe*”, Strong’s # 2222, spiritual life. See further definition and distinction in *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, p. 367.

<sup>590</sup> 1 John 5:12

<sup>591</sup> 1 John 4:8

<sup>592</sup> 1 Timothy 1:17 & 6:16. i.e. Man is not created as an immortal being. Eternal life must be received from God through faith in Christ.

<sup>593</sup> “has”: Greek: echo, Strong’s # 2192, taken hold of, taken possession of (through faith).

<sup>594</sup> 1 John 5:12

<sup>595</sup> “know”: (Greek) *ginosko*, Strong’s # 1097, to know absolutely, to perceive and understand by means of a relationship, even an intimate relationship (e.g., between a man and a woman).

<sup>596</sup> Matthew 11:27; John 1:18; 14:9.

explanation of the essence of the New Covenant. And secondly, a brief explanation of how Jesus was a Pattern for **knowing God**.

# What is the New Covenant All About?

What is the essence of the New Covenant? The most significant scriptural reference to the New Covenant is **Jeremiah 31:31-34**. Its significance is attested to in that the writer to the Hebrews, who was focused on distinguishing the New Covenant from the Old Covenant, chose to quote Jeremiah verbatim in **Hebrews 8:8-12**. Let's look the passage in the *Amplified Bible* translation:

*<sup>8</sup> "However, God finds fault with them<sup>597</sup> [showing its inadequacy] when He says, "Behold, the days will come, says the Lord, when I will make and ratify a new covenant with the house of Israel<sup>598</sup> and with the house of Judah<sup>599</sup>; <sup>9</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not abide in My covenant, and so I withdrew My favor and disregarded them, says the Lord. <sup>10</sup> "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will imprint My laws upon their minds [even upon their innermost thoughts and understanding], and engrave them upon their hearts [effecting their regeneration]. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>11</sup> "And it will not be [necessary] for each one to teach his fellow citizen, or each one his brother, saying, 'Know [by experience, have knowledge of] the Lord,' for all will know [by experience and have knowledge of] Me, from the least to the greatest of them. <sup>12</sup> "For I will be merciful and gracious toward their wickedness, and I will remember their sins no more."*

I have underlined above the two major aspects of the New Covenant<sup>600</sup>:

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<sup>597</sup> "them": Israel and the Old Covenant

<sup>598</sup> The Northern kingdom when the nation was divided.

<sup>599</sup> The Southern kingdom when the nation was divided.

<sup>600</sup> There is a third aspect which I will refer to from Ezekiel 36:26-27.

- 1) God imprints His law upon the minds and engraves it upon the hearts of New Covenant people.<sup>601</sup>
- 2) New Covenant people all know the Lord (namely, have experiential knowledge of God through relationship with Him).<sup>602</sup>

The third aspect of the New Covenant we find in Ezekiel 36:26-27:

*<sup>26</sup> “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”*

- 3) New Covenant people have a new heart which causes them to desire to be obedient to God, and a new spirit which empowers them to be pleasing to God. They have “received the Spirit of Christ” and are “led by the Spirit”.<sup>603</sup>

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<sup>601</sup> Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10; 10:16

<sup>602</sup> Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:11; Cf. Jeremiah 9:23-24; Isaiah 54:13; John 12:32

<sup>603</sup> Romans 8:9-10, 14; Cf. John 6:63; 2 Corinthians 3:6

# Seeing from God's Point of View

*"We are asking God that you may see things, as it were, from his point of view by being given spiritual insight and understanding."*

Colossians 1:9, J.B. Phillips Translation

*"God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."* 1 Samuel 16:7

**God's point of view is primarily internal** – not external. God considers the **heart** – not external activities. From God's point of view, what does it mean to be transformed and conformed to the image of Christ? Well, it has more to do with being than doing – less to do with doing prescribed activities, and more to do with being like Jesus in nature and character. (Doing naturally follows being.)

From God's point of view, the Old Covenant, its "letters", and the way it operated (externally) was inadequate<sup>604</sup> (except to reveal sin)<sup>605</sup>. And from God's point of view, the New Covenant, the Law of Christ directed by the Spirit, and the way it operates (internally), is perfect (complete) – and reveals sin in a much deeper way<sup>606</sup>. In order to truly see and understand Jesus as our Pattern, we must see and understand the New Covenant from

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<sup>604</sup> Romans 8:2-4; Hebrews 7:18

<sup>605</sup> Romans 7:7

<sup>606</sup> Matthew 5:27-48. I have found that the Holy Spirit intentionally reveals my sin at levels deeper than my mere external misdemeanors. He patiently reveals implications and ramifications of my attitudes and actions, which I naturally would not have considered. This revelation process does not lead to a sense of condemnation, but rather a fuller appreciation of God's perspective on sin – viz. "hating the sin and loving the sinner".

God's point of view – specifically, the way it operates – that is internally, as directed by the Spirit. I believe the apostle Paul began to explain this in 2 Corinthians 3:2-6:

<sup>2</sup>“You are our letter, written in our hearts, known, and read by all men; <sup>3a</sup>“being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us.”

Here, Paul is stating God's calling and purpose for His people in the New Covenant: To be a human “letter”<sup>607</sup>, an epistle of Christ, to be known and manifested to others. This epistle of Christ is something internal – that is, written on hearts – something of Christ's nature and character which is communicated to others. This human “letter” is not an instruction on a set of prescribed external activities.

<sup>3b</sup> “Written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

This epistle of Christ, “written” on hearts, is something which can only be authored by the Spirit of the Living God. This is true because Jesus said: “No one knows the Son except the Father”.<sup>608</sup> In Luke 10:22, the Greek verb *ginosko*<sup>609</sup> is used meaning *knows by experience*. Matthew 11:17, the Greek word *epiginosko*<sup>610</sup> is used meaning *fully knows*. And Matthew 16:17,

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<sup>607</sup> Greek: *epistole*, Strong's # 1992, a literary correspondence. (Not a letter of the alphabet).

<sup>608</sup> Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22

<sup>609</sup> Strong's # 1097

<sup>610</sup> Strong's # 1921



Jesus indicated that the Father is the One who reveals the Son. So, only the Spirit of the Living God can “write” this epistle of Christ – and write it on human hearts. This process is in a different category from writing with ink on paper – for two reasons:

Firstly, what is communicated to and through the heart is not that which can be “captured” (contained) with ink on paper. We can attempt to describe with words of human language that which is being communicated by the Spirit of the Living God. In fact, this is a necessary and worthwhile exercise for us human beings to engage in – viz. theology, the study of God. But human words written with ink on paper cannot communicate the full knowledge of what is being written on hearts by the Spirit of the Living God, which He desires to communicate to others. The New Testament scriptures speak of knowledge<sup>611</sup> - that which is known through mental comprehension, and full knowledge<sup>612</sup> - that which is known through life experience. This is God’s standard in the New Covenant – to speak through His Son, and also through each member of His body<sup>613</sup> - that is, to speak THROUGH LIFE, and not just through “letters”.

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<sup>611</sup> Greek: gnosis, Strong’s # 1108. Ibid, Vine: knowledge of an object “as an enquiry, investigation”. Ibid, Renn: “concerned primarily with human knowledge”.

<sup>612</sup> Greek: epignosis, Strong’s # 1922. Ibid, Vine: “a strengthened form of gnosis, expressing a fuller knowledge, a greater participation by the ‘knower’ in the object known”. Ibid, Renn: “knowledge of moral and ethical values, intimate acquaintance with of God”.

<sup>613</sup> No one person can contain or fully communicate Christ in His fullness. Romans 12:3

Secondly, this living epistle of Christ cannot be “captured” (contained) in the writing of human words with ink on paper, because the revelation of the mystery of Christ is infinite and, therefore, “unsearchable” or “unfathomable”.<sup>614</sup> This is not to say that the Canon of scripture does not contain the full revelation of Christ.<sup>615</sup> Rather, this is to say that we need – and God desires - to have a living example of the full spectrum of all the various aspects of Christ manifested through human lives and human experience in order to fully understand<sup>616</sup> the full meaning of very words the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the scriptures to write with ink on paper. This is a “living epistle” of Christ. **The Prototype of “living epistles” is Christ in His incarnation through Jesus of Nazareth – Jesus is our Pattern.**

*<sup>4</sup> “Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. <sup>5</sup> Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God<sup>617</sup>, <sup>6</sup> who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”*

2 Corinthians 3:4-6

The law of the New Covenant surpasses<sup>618</sup> the law of the Old Covenant.<sup>619</sup> The Mosaic law of the Old Covenant could be written in “letters” captured (contained) on tablets of stone. The Law of Christ of the New Covenant is **“of the Spirit”** and “written on hearts”. Because of its **internal nature**, in

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<sup>614</sup> Ephesians 3:8. Greek: *anexeraunetos*, Strong’s # 419.

<sup>615</sup> There are many who would say that – I think they call themselves “deconstructionists”. But I am not one of them.

<sup>616</sup> This is in reference to understanding which comes through nothing less than divine revelation by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>617</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:7-12.

<sup>618</sup> “Better” is a key word found a number of times in the Letter to the Hebrews, an epistle which compares the New Covenant with the Old and describes the New to be “better than” the Old in every way.

<sup>619</sup> Matthew 5:20; 2 Corinthians 3:7-11; Hebrews 8:6-7.

order to walk in the Law of Christ, one must “receive the Spirit of Christ”<sup>620</sup>, be “born of the Spirit”<sup>621</sup>, and be “led by the Spirit”<sup>622</sup>. Author Charles Leiter put it this way: “The Law of Christ is as inexhaustible as the Person of Christ Himself. To ‘love as Christ loved’<sup>623</sup> is too penetrating of a standard to be exhaustively conveyed by any finite list of rules.”<sup>624</sup>

The key to walking in the New Covenant is not trying to do what Jesus did, but surrendering to be what Jesus is like. It is not about doing prescribed activities; it’s about being like Jesus in nature and character. We can do what Jesus did without being like Him. But if we are like Him, we will naturally do what He did.

This is NOT to say that all of the commandments written in the New Testament<sup>625</sup>, including all of the Lord’s commandments written in the gospels<sup>626</sup> are of no value. That which is “written with ink on paper”, since it is inspired by God, is to be held in utmost esteem. As the apostle Paul said, *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable<sup>627</sup> for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness”*.<sup>628</sup> But, Paul also said it is of “no value” as “the letter of the law” to be accomplished through the self-effort of

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<sup>620</sup> Romans 8:9-10

<sup>621</sup> John 3:3-6

<sup>622</sup> Romans 8:14

<sup>623</sup> John 13:34

<sup>624</sup> “*The Law of Christ*”, Charles Leiter, p. 181.

<sup>625</sup> For example, the “One Anothers”.

<sup>626</sup> For example, the “Sermon on the Mount” and all the other written references to the “Law of Christ”.

<sup>627</sup> Greek: *ophelimos*, Strong’s # 5624, helpful, beneficial

<sup>628</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16

the flesh.<sup>629</sup> It is important to understand that being “led by the Spirit” includes reading, studying and reflecting on that which is “written with ink on paper”, because the Holy Spirit primarily uses the scriptures, which He inspired, to teach, reprove, correct, and train disciples of Christ in the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”<sup>630</sup>: The Holy Spirit is continually giving us more and deeper understanding of the scriptures - as we read the same verses from time to time in different life situations, He gives more and deeper understanding of the very same verses.

*“For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did<sup>631</sup>: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh (and according to “the letter”) but according to the Spirit.”<sup>632</sup>“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”<sup>633</sup>*

“The fruit of the Spirit”, as well as “the Beatitudes”,<sup>634</sup> are examples of the attributes of Christ’s nature and character. So again, if we become like Him, we will (super)naturally do what He did. What is “written with ink on paper” – “the letter”, so to speak - is a description of what He is like. But the power to

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<sup>629</sup> Colossians 2:20-23. “no value” - Greek: *time*, Strong’s 5092, in this case: of no spiritual value, or of no spiritual efficacy, usefulness, effectiveness.

<sup>630</sup> Romans 8:2

<sup>631</sup> And continues to do through the Spirit.

<sup>632</sup> Romans 8:3-4.

<sup>633</sup> Galatians 5:22-23.

<sup>634</sup> Matthew 5:3-11.

be what He is like and do what He did is, not of “the letter”, but “OF THE SPIRIT”.

What Jesus is like cannot be totally captured in “the letter”. When God reveals an aspect of Christ (through the scriptures and the Spirit), we can attempt to communicate it through “letters” (writing messages); but we will never be able to record all of Christ. He cannot be contained in “written letters”. He is to be communicated through “living letters” – through human beings - just as Jesus of Nazareth communicated the Father.<sup>635</sup> Of course, only “the only begotten Son”<sup>636</sup> is “the exact representation” of God.<sup>637</sup> Human beings can only REFLECT the glory of the Lord.

The writer to the Hebrews, who so completely contrasted the New Covenant with the Old, opened his letter with these words:

*“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.”*<sup>638</sup> Jesus is to be communicated, not through prescribed activities which can be written down in a list on stone tablets, but through you and I – “living letters”<sup>639</sup>, “living stones”<sup>640</sup>, “human letters”. This is God’s purpose in the New Covenant.

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<sup>635</sup> John 1:18. Greek: *exegeomai*, Strong’s # 1834. Vine: “to unfold in teaching, to declare by making known”. Vincent: “to draw out in narrative, to relate in full, interpret, translate, thus, exegesis, interpret, explain”.

<sup>636</sup> John 1:14

<sup>637</sup> Hebrews 1:3

<sup>638</sup> Hebrews 1:1-2

<sup>639</sup> The heading for 2 Corinthians 2:1-3 in the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

<sup>640</sup> 1 Peter 2:5

# His Image, Our Pattern

Along with His death, Jesus' life is also included in God's plan of redemption. Jesus' life on earth gave us the pattern for knowing God, and living in communion with Him, thus restoring eternal life.<sup>641</sup> And it is God's New Covenant promise that the power of His resurrection life will enable us to walk according to this **pattern**.<sup>642</sup> This **pattern** does not particularly consist of the practice of prescribed religious activities – but rather, how Jesus related to and walked with the Father. This is what Jesus was communicating when He said: *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”*<sup>643</sup> Those are very broad categories Jesus used – the Way, the Truth, and the Life – but all refer to a grand restoration - a restoration with regards to walking in communion with God and reflecting the image of God. While we want to do what He did, the New Covenant is not about practicing prescribed activities. It is about living a life – the way Jesus lived His life on this earth. *“The Spirit gives life”*, not primarily to enable us to perform prescribed activities, but ultimately, *to transform us and conform us to the image of Christ*. It is His image which is our Pattern.

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<sup>641</sup> When Humanity fell into sin, it fell out of life (union with God) into death (separation from God).

<sup>642</sup> Ezekiel 36:26-27; Cf. Jeremiah 31:33; Colossians 1:29; Cf. Colossians 2:12; Philippians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 15:10

<sup>643</sup> John 14:6

Bearing in mind that the riches of Christ are “unsearchable”<sup>644</sup>, it is actually impossible to expound on all aspects of the image of Christ. I’m offering here **a few select “pictures” of Jesus** to which the Holy Spirit seems to have directed me. These are particular aspects of Christ which He is drawing attention to in my personal spiritual life. And I sense that these are aspects of Christ which the Spirit of God would particularly want manifested in His people. I hope it will serve to help us better see Jesus as the perfect Pattern for walking in the New Covenant.

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<sup>644</sup> Ephesians 3:8

# A Suffering Servant

*“To be my disciple, you must deny yourself and take up your cross daily and follow Me.”<sup>645</sup>*

Here, Jesus gives us His definition “His cross” and “your cross”: namely, **self-denial - for the glory of God**<sup>646</sup>. He also specifies that a **primary aspect of His image is self-denying love**. In past generations, much was written on **self-denial** and **the surrendered life**. But this topic is conspicuously absent in contemporary Christianity.<sup>647</sup> However, Jesus made it clear that this is what it means to “follow Him” – that is, to follow His pattern and be His disciple.

*“Looking away from all that will distract us and focusing our eyes on Jesus, who is the Author and Perfecter of faith [the first incentive for our belief and the One who brings our faith to maturity], who for the joy [of accomplishing the goal] set before Him endured the cross.” Hebrews 12:2-3 AMP*

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<sup>645</sup> Luke 9:23; Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Cf. Luke 14:27; Matthew 10:38; Hebrews 13:13.

<sup>646</sup> Cf. John 17:1-5. It must be made clear that Christ’s self-denial was ONLY for the glory of God. There were times when Jesus did not allow Himself to be subjected to suffering because it was not in the will of God. Certainly, Satan is not to receive glory in our suffering. And, most importantly, we are not to fall into the insidious trap of glorifying self through self-denial. Viz. “I am super-spiritual because I’ve suffered so much for Jesus, et. al.”

<sup>647</sup> Recommended Reading: My articles: **Brokenness; Death Activates Life; Transformation of Self; The Way of the Cross**. Complimentary copies of these articles can be obtained by emailing:

[AtChristsTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristsTable@gmail.com) I can fully recommend J. Sidlow Baxter’s treatment of these things in his books: “A New Call to Holiness”, “His Deeper Work in Us”, and “Our High Calling”. (These three titles have been combined in one volume entitled “Christian Holiness Restudied and Restated”.) But I also can recommend: “The Surrendered Life” by James H. McConkey; “Born Crucified” by L.E. Maxwell; “Life Out of Death” by Jesse Penn Lewis; “The Crucified Life” by A.W. Tozer, and daily devotionals: “My Utmost for His Highest” by Oswald Chambers and “Streams in the Desert” by L.B. Cowman.



When “*looking to Jesus the Author and Perfector of faith*”, it is essential to understand that the Christ of God, who is our Pattern, is a Crucified Christ.<sup>648</sup> He modeled **suffering** for us. It may seem a bit strange to list **suffering** right at the top of the many aspects of Christ’s Pattern; but, if our model is not the **Crucified Christ**, we are involved with something other than biblical Christianity. The apostle Paul warned that there is “*another Jesus*”, a “*different spirit*”, and a “*different gospel*”.<sup>649</sup> A “*different gospel*” introduces a different kind of “christianity”. A “*different spirit*” births a different kind of “christian”. “*Another Jesus*” presents a different image to be conformed to. The Christ of God, who was prophesied<sup>650</sup>, but stumbled over<sup>651</sup>, was a Crucified Christ. That is the image of Christ, and the Pattern of the New Covenant.

The scope of this article cannot contain a treatment of the message and the **Way of the Cross** or a presentation of a theology of suffering, but I have written of these things in detail in other articles.<sup>652</sup> A theology of suffering and the **Way of the Cross** are matters which are sorely absent in contemporary Christianity and need to be restored in order to rectify our partial image of Christ and inaccurate concepts of Christianity.

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<sup>648</sup> This is not to say that we worship a Christ who is still on the cross, for He conquered death, was resurrected and ascended, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

<sup>649</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:4

<sup>650</sup> Isaiah 53:1-12

<sup>651</sup> Isaiah 8:14; Cf. Romans 9:32-33; 1 Peter 2:8.

<sup>652</sup> *Walking with Sorrow, The Way of the Cross, Seeing the Kingdom Through the Cross, Who Is This King of Glory?, Death Activates Life, God-Centeredness, and The Cross & the Powers of Darkness*. Complimentary copies of these essays can be obtained by emailing: [AtChristTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristTable@gmail.com)

<sup>21</sup> *“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.”* 1 Peter 2:21

This is the **“example”** Jesus Christ left for us: **the way of the Cross** – that is, self-denying love for the glory of God. Because of the fallen nature of the self, denial of self entails an aspect of **suffering**. Yet, as we are conformed more and more to the image of Christ, the transformed self<sup>653</sup> experiences the blessing of the love of God flowing through the soul.

*“In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.”* Hebrews 5:7-8

In a manner of speaking, Jesus was the very first Christian – He is *“the Author and Perfector of faith”*<sup>654</sup> – **our Example** – **our Pattern**, therefore, **suffering** is to be considered an integral component of the normal Christian life. The Father saw fit for the Son to learn and grow through **suffering**. Can we expect to learn and grow spiritually without **suffering**? The spiritual truth that Jesus suffered for us in no way precludes **suffering** from the lives of the redeemed. Quite the opposite: Peter said, *“You have been called for this purpose...”*. But what specific aspects of **suffering** are these verses

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<sup>653</sup> In my article, *Transformation of Self*, I endeavor to make the case for *transformation of self*, rather than “crucifixion of self” or “death of self” type language and perspectives. J. Sidlow Baxter also makes this distinction in his *“Christian Holiness Restudied and Restated”*.

<sup>654</sup> Hebrews 12:2

referring to? Let's continue with what Peter said next in the passage we referenced:

*“Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.” 1 Peter 1:22-23*

And let's also look at what the writer to the Hebrews said next in the passage we referenced:

*“Endured the cross disregarding the shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God [revealing His deity, His authority, and the completion of His work]. Just consider and meditate on Him who endured from sinners such bitter hostility against Himself [consider it all in comparison with your trials], so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” Hebrews 12:2b-3 AMP*

So, we see some of the aspects of **suffering** Jesus modeled for us: Along with self-denying love for the glory of God, He suffered being sinned against by sinners in various ways. Who are the “sinners” we are referring to? All the unredeemed – but, also all the redeemed sinners as well, for we Christians abuse Christ's grace towards us and also sin against one another, even as did the first century disciples of Christ.

## A Disciplined Son

<sup>4</sup>“You have not yet struggled to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; <sup>5</sup> and you have forgotten the divine word of encouragement which is addressed to you as sons, “My son, do not make light of the discipline of the Lord, and do not lose heart and give up when you are corrected by Him.” Hebrews 12:4-5 AMP

Here, the writer to the Hebrews is discussing “**the discipline of the Lord**”. We need to understand what that is and why that is. The Greek word<sup>655</sup> used here has to do with “the training of a child, including instruction ... correction that regulates character”<sup>656</sup>. Regarding the aspect of “*correction*”, we must note the context which the writer gives us – “*striving against sin*”. That is the nature and the purpose of the “*correction*” – to grow in Christ-likeness.<sup>657</sup> This is the path of discipleship which Jesus modeled for us.

<sup>6</sup>“For the Lord disciplines and corrects those whom He loves, and He punishes<sup>658</sup> every son whom He receives and welcomes [to His heart]. <sup>7</sup> You must submit to [correction for the purpose of] discipline; God is dealing with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> Now if you are exempt from

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<sup>655</sup> *paideia*, Strong’s # 3809

<sup>656</sup> W.E. Vine. Cf. Ephesians 6:4.

<sup>657</sup> It is interesting to point out that the “striving against sin” going “to the point of shedding blood” is a reference to Jesus going to the cross; yet the same writer also said that Jesus was “without sin”. (Hebrews 4:5; Cf. 1 Peter 2:22) So, the cross (self-denying love) is God’s method for dealing with sin – our sin (not Jesus’).

<sup>658</sup> Greek: *mastigoo*, Strong’s # 3148, means to whip - literally or figuratively – admittedly the figurative sense is less problematic. But I believe that even physical “whippings” in our lives (e.g. negative medical, or financial, or relational developments in our lives) are not literally from the hand of God (Cf. Proverbs 3:12), but rather are from the hand of the Adversary, and are the result of our choices and their consequences. For more on this particular subject, see my article, A Terrifying Thing (For a complimentary .PDF copy, email

[AtChristTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristTable@gmail.com) )

correction and without discipline, in which all [of God's children] share, then you are illegitimate children and not sons [at all]. <sup>9</sup> Moreover, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we submitted and respected them [for training us]; shall we not much more willingly submit to the Father of spirits, and live [by learning from His discipline]? <sup>10</sup> For our earthly fathers disciplined us for only a short time as seemed best to them; but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. <sup>11</sup> For the time being, no discipline brings joy, but seems sad and painful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness [right standing with God and a lifestyle and attitude that seeks conformity to God's will and purpose]." Hebrews 12:6-11 AMP

This passage, which is self-explanatory, paints a picture of Jesus as a Son walking under the discipline of His Father. **Discipline** for the purpose of correction, learning and training is something which typified Jesus' relationship with His Father – the Pattern given by Jesus as the Son of God. But in much of contemporary Christianity, the Christian's relationship with God is too often typified by all the physical and emotional "blessings" the child can receive from the Father. It is no wonder that we have such a dearth of disciples devoted to serving the King and His Kingdom.

Also in this passage from Hebrews are two other traits typifying disciples devoted to serving the King and His Kingdom: Jesus' "respect" for and "submission" to the Father. Jesus Himself alluded to these traits as exemplifying the necessary attitude and posture for walking with the Father and serving in His Kingdom :

*“So, Jesus answered them by saying, “I assure you and most solemnly say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself [of His own accord], unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever things the Father does, the Son[in His turn] also does in the same way.... I can do nothing on my own initiative or authority. Just as I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just (fair, righteous, unbiased), because I do not seek My own will, but only the will of Him who sent Me.” John 5:19 & 30 AMP*

**Jesus walked with the utmost respect for and submission to the Father. He learned<sup>659</sup> to only speak what the Father is speaking and only do what the Father is doing. This is a spiritual discipline and skill which must be learned – in order to hear and see what God is saying and doing, and to speak and act in accord with His Spirit. To walk in this way shows respect for and submission to God, because it demonstrates a belief that what God has to say and do is much more important than what we think we should say and do.**

Actually, the correct term for such a demeanor is the word **“meekness”**. I would suggest that reflecting on the meaning of **“meekness”** would afford us more insight into the nature and character of Jesus as our Pattern for the New Covenant. The Greek word translated **“meekness”<sup>660</sup>** in the New Testament is very rich in meaning. It seems correct to say that **“meekness”** includes two other character traits: **“humility”** (residing inwardly) and **“gentleness”** (expressed outwardly). **Meekness** is “the gentle, quiet spirit of

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<sup>659</sup> Hebrews 5:8 says He learned it through suffering.

<sup>660</sup> *prautes*, Strong’s # 4240

selfless devotion to God that is also (sometimes) translated ‘gentleness’. ‘Meekness’ is the very antithesis of arrogant pride.”<sup>661</sup>

But key to understanding the whole concept of “meekness” is that “it consists not in his outward behavior only; nor yet in his relations to his fellow-men, as little in his mere natural disposition. Rather, it is an inwrought grace of the soul; and the exercise of it are first and chiefly towards God. It is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore, without disputing or resisting; it is closely linked with ‘humility’ and follows directly upon it.... It is only the humble heart which is also the meek, and which, as such, does not fight against God or struggle and contend with Him.” <sup>662</sup>

Inward “meekness” and “humility” towards God will naturally manifest outwardly in “gentleness” towards others. It is the same as truly loving God which results in loving others also. Now, while on a number of occasions, Jesus may not have been “gentle” in dealing with the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus was always “meek” toward His Father. In this, He is the Pattern for our relationship with God and walking in the New Covenant.

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<sup>661</sup> Ibid., Stephen D. Renn

<sup>662</sup> Ibid, W.E. Vine.

## A Man of Sorrows

*<sup>1</sup>“Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? <sup>2</sup>For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. <sup>3</sup>He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” Isaiah 53:1-3*

I will end with this particular picture of Jesus as our Pattern for the New Covenant. Isaiah 53 in its entirety is a prophecy of what the coming Messiah would look like. I've intentionally referenced just the first three verses. Verses 4 through 12 speak of His messianic role, which happened to play out in a way that was diametrically the opposite of the Rome-conquering Redeemer the Jews expected. These verses describe His work of redemption, which only He, the God-Man could accomplish on our behalf. **But verses 1 through 3 speak of Jesus in His humanity - a description we can identify with and is an Example for us to follow.**

*<sup>1</sup>“Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? <sup>2</sup>For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.*

Most of the Jews waiting for the Messiah, even those who “searched the scriptures”, failed to see that they testified of Jesus<sup>663</sup>. Why did they not

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<sup>663</sup> John 5:39-47



recognize Him when He came? He just didn't look like their concept of the Son of God. They didn't believe in him - instead he was *"a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"*<sup>664</sup>.

I believe Jesus addressed this a number of times, but maybe this was the first time – when He spoke to the crowds about John the Baptist:

*<sup>7</sup> "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup> But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces! <sup>9</sup> But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup> This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way before You.'*"<sup>665</sup>

Jesus was speaking specifically about John the Baptist, but I believe what He said applies to all of us who would be *"His messenger" to "prepare the way of the Lord"*. It is grievous, indeed, when we see "pastors" and other "ministers" who are proud, arrogant, and self-absorbed, for they reflect the opposite of Christ-likeness. They falsely represent the Lord. But we can say the same about all Christians who haven't learned from Jesus His gentleness and humbleness of heart.<sup>666</sup> Their "jealousy, selfish ambition and arrogance also lie against the truth"<sup>667</sup>.

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<sup>664</sup> Isaiah 28:16; 1 Peter 2:8

<sup>665</sup> Matthew 11:7-10

<sup>666</sup> Matthew 11:29

<sup>667</sup> James 3:14

Yes, the triumphant, risen Lord Jesus is an awesome sight “with eyes like a flame of fire, feet like burnished bronze, a voice like the sound of many waters, a mouth with a sharp two-edged sword, and a face like the sun shining in its strength”<sup>668</sup>. But it is the gentle, humble Jesus in His earthly humanity which will be uniquely “attractive” in the vainglorious world in which we live. Indeed, those who do not know Him as the Lord of lords and the King of kings are looking for a Jesus they can relate to in their humanity. That is exactly why He was incarnated in the way He is described by Isaiah.<sup>669</sup>

Isaiah went on to say:

*<sup>3</sup> He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.*

Notwithstanding the mystery of how the Father “gives” (revelation of Christ), “draws” and “grants” those who are lost to come to Jesus<sup>670</sup>, **being like Jesus is otherwise never going to be “attractive” to the world**. I believe it would be accurate to say that throughout church history, whenever it has been “popular” to be a Christian, it is because Christians had become “worldly”. Jesus – and therefore, His authentic disciples – will be generally despised, forsaken, and not esteemed by the world simply because “*the*

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<sup>668</sup> Revelation 1:12-16.

<sup>669</sup> Of course, it must be “granted by the Father” for them to come to Jesus. John 5:37-38; 6:37, 44, 65.

<sup>670</sup> John 5:37-38; 6:37, 44, 65.

*love of the Father is not in them (those who are worldly), and they (the worldly) do not know Him".*<sup>671</sup>

*"Let Christ himself be your example as to what your attitude should be. For he, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God's equal, but stripped himself of all privilege by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man. And, having become man, he humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying, and the death he died was the death of a common criminal."*<sup>672</sup>

Isaiah described Jesus, our Example and Pattern, as *"A man of sorrows, acquainted with grief"*<sup>673</sup>. This was one of the marks by which Israel was to know her Messiah – **"A Man of Sorrows"**. Sorrow and grief characterized Jesus' life on earth. He was familiar with – intimate with – sorrow and grief. He knew it personally<sup>674</sup>, and He knew it in others<sup>675</sup>.

This characteristic of being **"acquainted with grief and sorrow"** speaks first and foremost of Christ's fellowship<sup>676</sup> with Fallen Humanity. Jesus was intimately acquainted with the sorrow and grief of the human condition. Kings and lords, and the rich and powerful of the earth insulate themselves from humanity's woes, but Jesus shared in and partnered with and

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<sup>671</sup> 1 John 2:15; 3:1; 5:1.

<sup>672</sup> Philippians 2:5-8 *J.B. Phillips New Testament in Modern English*

<sup>673</sup> Isaiah 53:3

<sup>674</sup> He suffered rejection and unrequited love (John 1:10-11). He endured the "hostility of sinners against Himself" (Hebrews 12:3). He was betrayed and abandoned by His own disciples (Matthew 26:47-75) and experienced the sense of being forsaken by His Father (Matthew 27:46).

<sup>675</sup> John 11:35; Luke 19:41

<sup>676</sup> The Greek word, *koinonia*, Strong's # 2842, generally translated "fellowship" in the verb form, *kononeo*, Strong's # 2841, means to "share in", "partner with", and "participate in".

participated in the fallen human condition. He was without sin, yet He ultimately became the Sin-bearer and Scapegoat of humanity on the Cross. This identification with the human condition when he was lifted up upon the cross is actually the power of attraction by which He “draws all men to Himself”.<sup>677</sup> Likewise, He is our Example, the Pattern for our relationship with God and humanity, and for living life in the New Covenant, “for as He is, so also are we in this world”<sup>678</sup> – “for we realize that our life in this world is actually his life lived in us”<sup>679</sup>.

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<sup>677</sup> John 12:32-33

<sup>678</sup> 1 John 4:17

<sup>679</sup> 1 John 4:17 J.B. Phillips New Testament in Modern English

# POSTSCRIPT

## Concerning Gathering

**“Let us consider how to stimulate one another to LOVE and GOOD DEEDS, not forsaking our own ASSEMBLING TOGETHER.”**



*“**How** we get together is not nearly as important as **WHY** we get together. When fulfilling what one might perceive to be a mandate of scripture becomes the underlying reason to attend a local assembly, or when attempts to tear down man made organizations and structures, to get back to the way they did it back then, misses the whole point.”*

*Jim Durkin Jr.<sup>680</sup>*



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<sup>680</sup> Turning Point Gatherings, Humbolt County, CA

# PART I

## Introduction

When I came across the above quote, it seemed to connect with what I had been writing – namely, this series - *A New & Living Way: An Investigation into New Covenant Worship in Spirit & Truth*.<sup>681</sup> In this current article, I'd like to approach the subject of "Gathering", NOT on *how* we gather, or *where* and *when* we gather, but WHY we gather, hoping that will lead to some insight into the nature of our collective life in the New Covenant. The "collective life" I'm referring to is *worship* – as we have defined it: *a lifestyle of surrender and service to the Lord*. And just one component in this lifestyle involves *gathering* – **gatherings of the Ecclesia** – WHY would the Ecclesia gather?

We will consider WHY we would gather in light of:

- 1) Custom
- 2) The New Testament Scriptures
- 3) The New Commandment
- 4) The Commission of the Church
- 5) The New Covenant

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<sup>681</sup> *A New & Living Way: List of Articles - Ecclesia / Elemental Principles of Worship / Another Look at Worship / Jewish Roots in Christianity / Led by the Spirit / Elementary Principles of the World: Sacralization of the Spiritual, Sacralization of the Secular, and Conventional Worship Praxes / Concerning Gathering / "I Have Given You as a Covenant"*. Along with that series of articles, other suggested reading for this current article would include: "Custom and Command" by Stan Firth, "Hebrews 10:25: What are We Not to Forsake?" by Peter Ditzel, and "Gathering Together" by Jack Gray.

Before we begin, I'd like to say two things:

These will be just some thoughts on the matter – not the end of the matter. I think the Church (Ecclesia) still needs the Holy Spirit to “*guide us into all the truth.*” (John 16:13)

There are a lot of footnotes. If you don't read them, you will miss a lot. In this case, the footnotes often EXPLAIN statements I make.

# Custom

*Do we gather merely because of custom<sup>682</sup>?*

The particular “custom” I am referring to here is the custom of “a corporate worship service” which is basically comprised of the following components:

- Visiting with one another before the meeting begins
- Singing
- A collection
- Announcements
- A sermon
- More singing (representing a collective response to the message)
- Prayer (representing a collective response to the message), which sometimes includes prayer for individual needs
- Dismissal
- More visiting with one another after the meeting
- Repeat once or twice every Sunday, plus possibly, one additional evening of the week.

*Did God tell us to gather and worship Him in this way?*

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<sup>682</sup> A habitual practice



## Old Covenant Sacrificial Ritual

God did tell the nation of Israel to gather and worship in a specific way according to the Old Covenant: He commanded them to come together three specific times per year<sup>683</sup> at a designated place<sup>684</sup> for the purpose of conducting specific animal and grain sacrifices:<sup>685</sup> voluntary sacrifices - burnt offerings<sup>686</sup>, grain offerings<sup>687</sup>, peace offerings<sup>688</sup>, and mandatory sacrifices - sin offerings<sup>689</sup> and trespass offerings.<sup>690</sup> This Levitical sacrificial system continued for approximately 1440 years up to 70 A.D. when Rome destroyed the temple at Jerusalem. But God, Himself, had already put an end to this system about 37 years earlier at the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>691</sup> These material sacrifices were shadows; but the reality is Christ.<sup>692</sup> Now, in the New Covenant, the only thing that can be given to God

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<sup>683</sup> Namely, the Feasts of Unleavened Bread (Passover), Weeks (Shavuot), and Tabernacles (Succoth). (Exodus 23:14, 17; 34:23; Deuteronomy 16:16)

<sup>684</sup> First, at the tabernacle of Moses, and then at David's tabernacle, and later at Solomon's temple and the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. (John 4:20; Cf. Deuteronomy 12:5, 13-14; 14:23-25; 26:2; 2 Chronicles 7:15-16; Isaiah 27:13. God had forbidden any other sites of worship. (2 Kings 18:22; 21:3; 2 Chronicles 32:12; 33:3; Isaiah 36:7)

<sup>685</sup> See Leviticus 23

<sup>686</sup> Leviticus 1; 6:8, 13; 8:18-21; 16:24.

<sup>687</sup> Leviticus 2; 6:14-23.

<sup>688</sup> Leviticus 3; 7:11-34

<sup>689</sup> Leviticus 4; 5:11-13; 6:24-30; 8:14-17; 16:3-22.

<sup>690</sup> Leviticus 5:14-19; 6:1-7; 7:1-6.

<sup>691</sup> Hebrews 10:1-10, 19-22

<sup>692</sup> Colossians 2:17

are spiritual sacrifices<sup>693</sup> – that is, “praise”<sup>694</sup> – namely, verbal<sup>695</sup> thanksgiving.<sup>696</sup>

Understanding the Old Testament types does have value in learning the mystery of Christ.<sup>697</sup> But practicing Old Covenant rituals has absolutely no application in New Covenant worship or Ecclesia gatherings.

*But, what about the Jewish Christians gathering in the temple in the Book of Acts?*

When we read in Acts 2:46 that the first Jewish Christians gathered “*Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple ....*”, we are tempted to take that as a “norm”<sup>698</sup> for the Church today.<sup>699</sup> But, this passage describes a very unique season at the beginning of the Church: Jesus had arisen from the dead and was appearing to people all over Jerusalem. And Jesus had told His disciples to STAY IN JERUSALEM AND WAIT to receive “*The Promise of the Father*”.<sup>700</sup> So, that’s what these Jews were doing. There were about 3000 of them – comprised of Jews who already lived in Jerusalem joined by

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<sup>693</sup> 1 Peter 2:5

<sup>694</sup> 1 Peter 2:9; Hebrews 13:15

<sup>695</sup> Greek: *cheilos*, Strong’s # 5491

<sup>696</sup> Greek: *ainesis*, Strong’s # 133

<sup>697</sup> Cf. My teachings: “Seeing Him Who is Unseen” and “Seeing Christ in the Tabernacle” – These are freely available by emailing: [AtChristTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristTable@gmail.com)

<sup>698</sup> i.e., prescriptive, rather than descriptive

<sup>699</sup> I have belonged to churches which tried gathering daily for a season, based on this verse.

<sup>700</sup> Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4.

“devout men from every nation under heaven”.<sup>701</sup> These were males<sup>702</sup> – not women and children – men who were highly religious – pious and devout<sup>703</sup> who had traveled very long distances on their yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Acts 2:5 says, “Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem....” The Greek word, *katoikeo*, informs us that these “devout men from every nation under heaven” had decided to now house in Jerusalem “permanently”.<sup>704</sup> These were particular men of means – not shepherds, farmers, and fishermen from the outlying districts of Jerusalem – but having left their properties and possessions were now needing food and lodging in Jerusalem.<sup>705</sup>

As I discussed at length earlier in this series<sup>706</sup>, these Jewish Christians continued in their customs based in the Mosaic Law for 300 years, right up to the time of Constantine.<sup>707</sup> In fact, the apostle Paul also publicly practiced these customs right up to the time of his arrest in Jerusalem, at which point, the Holy Spirit had brought him to a fuller understanding of the essential difference between the Old and the New Covenants, so that in his later

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<sup>701</sup> Acts 2:5

<sup>702</sup> Greek: *aner*, Strong’s # 435

<sup>703</sup> Greek: *eulabes*, Strong’s # 2126

<sup>704</sup> Strong’s # 2730, reside, dwell, inhabit. These men had left their properties and possessions back in their various nations. (Acts 2:9-11) We could speculate that because of their pentecostal experience in Jerusalem, they may have sent word back to their households to “sell up” and join them in Jerusalem.

<sup>705</sup> Cf. Acts 2:44-45

<sup>706</sup> See *Jewish Roots in Christianity* and *Led By the Spirit in the New & Living Way* series.

<sup>707</sup> This is discussed at length in *Jewish Roots in Christianity* and *Led By the Spirit* articles in my *New & Living Way* series.

epistles<sup>708</sup>, he referred to these customs negatively as “*elementary principles of the world*”<sup>709</sup> – practices Christians should no longer be engaged in.

*What about the Jewish Christians,  
including the apostle Paul,  
attending synagogue services in the Book of Acts?*

One might want to make the case that the synagogue service, which probably emerged during the Babylonian Captivity<sup>710</sup>, is the equivalent of the church “worship service”. This is quite true – the “order of service” of the conventional church “worship service” and the synagogue service is similar:

1. First the “Shema”, which the Jews would repeat several times daily, would be recited - “*Hear, O Israel! The Lord is Our God. The Lord is one!*”<sup>711</sup>
2. Then certain prayers would be spoken.
3. Then a reading from the Law.<sup>712</sup>
4. Then a reading from the Prophets.<sup>713</sup>
5. Then a sermon.<sup>714</sup>

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<sup>708</sup> Galatians (later dating of the North Galatia Theory), 2 Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, Colossians.

<sup>709</sup> Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20.

<sup>710</sup> Some think that synagogues possibly began during the time of Ezra with the rebuilding of the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple. But there is archeological evidence of synagogues in Egypt dating from the 300 B.C. However, synagogues predominated as gathering places after the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.

<sup>711</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4

<sup>712</sup> Genesis through Deuteronomy

<sup>713</sup> Intended to illustrate the Law

<sup>714</sup> The *synagogue rulers* would decide who was to lead the service and give the sermon. A different person would be chosen to lead each week.

The two “orders of service” are, indeed, quite similar; but the point is this: **As with the conventional church “worship service”, God never commanded the Jew to practice the synagogue service.** There is no such command recorded in the scriptures. It was a cultural custom – an entirely human invention – which emerged during the Exile. Indeed, one could say that the practice of the conventional church “worship service” also reflects the reality of a spiritual exile – an adopting of the customs of the surrounding culture, with its marketing techniques, organization, schedules, programs, entertainment, methodologies, and technologies – all “*elementary principles of the world*”<sup>715</sup>.

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<sup>715</sup> Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20. I have discussed these things at length in the *New & Living Way* series – *Elementary Principles of the World*.

# The New Testament Scriptures

*Do the New Testament scriptures command us to gather and worship God in this way?*

I would like to give my answer – or answers – and then explain why I have arrived at these answers: The answer is NO – the New Testament scriptures do not command us to gather and worship God in this way – or in any other prescribed way. **The New Testament scriptures may encourage us as to why we should gather; but do not command us where, when, or how to gather.** Therefore, we are not commanded to gather and worship God in what has become the conventional or customary “worship service”, nor in a way which resembles the synagogue service gathering.

The New Testament scriptures describe where, when, and how the early Christians gathered, but do not prescribe where, when, and how we are to gather. And, just before we discuss the words “descriptive” and “prescriptive”, I would like to state the end of the matter: **Not only concerning gatherings – but in all things - both the Holy Spirit, and the New Testament authors whom He inspired, intended to both describe and prescribe Jesus Christ – and that is, not according to the letter, but according to the Law of Christ<sup>716</sup> – the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.**<sup>717</sup>

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<sup>716</sup> Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 9:21

<sup>717</sup> Romans 8:2

## Descriptive or Prescriptive?

When we read of the activities of the first century church in the Book of Acts, which may also be referred to in the various Epistles, are we to take what we read as Prescriptive or Descriptive? This was discussed at length in a previous article - *Elementary Principles of the World: Conventional Worship Praxes*. But suffice to say here:

- “Descriptive” simply means “What did happen”. Generally speaking, the Book of Acts is descriptive. – It is an historical account of what did happen.
- “Prescriptive” simply means “What should happen.” Generally speaking, the Epistles are prescriptive. – They give instructions on what to do and what not to do.
- Descriptive passages tell us what did happen, but not what should happen. What happened in the first century church may be instructive and may be (or may not be) beneficial to imitate,<sup>718</sup> but may not necessarily be something that we are commanded to imitate. The fact that something did happen is not an edict of what must happen.  
Descriptive is not Prescriptive.
- Beyond this, we need to exercise a fundamental principle of hermeneutics by asking: What is the author’s intent in the passage – to prescribe or to describe? What we are looking for is not what we

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<sup>718</sup> I would add, if led by the Spirit to do so.

intend to do with the scripture passage<sup>719</sup>, but what the author intended to communicate through the scripture passage. In their book, *“How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth”*, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart say: “Unless Scripture explicitly tells us we must do something, what is only narratives or described does not function in a normative way.”<sup>720</sup>

Although some see the Book of Acts as normative, being an historical record, it should rather be understood as being generally descriptive. Some arguments specifically against the Book of Acts being generally prescriptive are:

- 1) All the way up to his arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 21), Paul continued to practice in public Jewish customs based on the Mosaic Law. This is descriptive. Paul himself, later prescribed not to do this.
- 2) Because something is mentioned once in an historical record (the Book of Acts), it is likely no more than an assumption to conclude that it was practiced by all the churches in all the places all the time, and thus, assumed to be normative. While the concept of “restoration” is not erroneous in essence, it has been misappropriated by some contingents of the Body of Christ in an effort to restore “the New Testament Pattern”.
- 3) The prescriptive seems to contradict the nature of the New Covenant in essence – namely, it should be a ministry *“according to the Spirit, not*

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<sup>719</sup> The insistent demand of our pragmatic culture to always “make a practical life applications” of scripture, may often actually encourage a specious use of scripture. (In any case, not everything is “about us”, and there is plenty of scripture which reveals God, and is not necessarily applicable to our material lives.)

<sup>720</sup> p. 124. Cf. pp. 126-130 for “6 Hermeneutical Principles for Interpreting Acts”.



*according to the letter*".<sup>721</sup> The principle (or law) of the New Covenant is: *"I have given You as a covenant..."*<sup>722</sup> – that is, *"The Law of Christ"*<sup>723</sup> – namely, *"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus"*.<sup>724</sup> The New Testament scriptures are not a "law", but are rather **descriptive of Christ**.

- 4) When looking at a passage in the Book of Acts – or the Epistles - we need to ask: "Did Jesus **command** His disciples to do this?" A **custom**, which may have good aspects, is not necessarily a command. In Matthew 5:48, Jesus commanded perfection (**completeness** – that is, in every possible situation). What we see in the New Testament scriptures are helpful as examples (descriptions) and principles, but as prescriptions, they fall short of the perfection of Christ – specifically, **they do not take in every possible situation – they are not complete.**

## **Some Non-prescriptive Descriptions in the New Testament**

As I said, I have dealt with these things in the article *Elementary Principles of the World: Conventional Worship Praxes*. There I specifically discussed these activities of the early church in the Book of Acts:

- **Gathering together on the first day of the week**
- **The Collection**
- **The Lord's Supper**

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<sup>721</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:6

<sup>722</sup> Isaiah 42:6

<sup>723</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2

<sup>724</sup> Romans 8:2

While many consider these activities found in the Book of Acts to be prescriptive and have become custom in the conventional “worship service” and also in Organic Church meetings, they are, in fact, descriptive.<sup>725</sup>

Also, a favorite activity of Organic Church adherents –

- the “Body ministry” which is found in the epistle, 1 Corinthians 14:26 – that is, each person at a gathering *“has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, an interpretation of a tongue”*.

While I believe this format for a gathering can be spiritually beneficial - more so with disciples established in the spiritual disciplines, who know the Lord, and know how to receive life from the Head and share it with the members of the Body, I propose that to say this particular format was normative for the first century church and is therefore prescriptive for the church today is merely an assumption. Nowhere in the scriptures did Paul instruct the Corinthians – or any other church<sup>726</sup> – to carry on this specific activity when gathering. He was merely describing the Corinthians’ customary gatherings. And Paul’s intention in the passage was to prescribe that *“all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.”*<sup>727</sup>

I must say that the “descriptive” / “prescriptive” paradigm is not satisfying to me, as I see the whole idea of **prescriptions of certain activities as being at the very core of “the elementary principles of the world”**<sup>728</sup>. It is not the

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<sup>725</sup> See *Elementary Principles of the World: Conventional Worship Praxes*

<sup>726</sup> There is no indication in scripture that other churches in other locations carried on this specific activity when gathering. They may have; but it is not recorded in scripture. To say it was normative is an assumption.

<sup>727</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:40; Cf. v.26-39.

<sup>728</sup> Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20.

activities themselves which are problematic, it is the prescribing of those activities which I perceive as “of the letter” and therefore violating the essence of the New Covenant by promoting a ministry “of the letter” rather than “of the Spirit” – “the Law of Christ”, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”. I am more of the persuasion to say, in a manner of speaking:

**Whatever we see in the New Testament scriptures that is descriptive of Christ is prescriptive. I believe it was the intention of the Holy Spirit and the authors He inspired to both describe and prescribe CHRIST through the New Testament scriptures.**

# The New Commandment

*What DID Jesus tell us to DO?*

Let's look at the last evening Jesus spent with His disciples and see what was on His heart and mind that He wanted to impart to them before He was arrested and crucified. He actually had a lot to say – His message that evening<sup>729</sup> was even longer than His “Sermon on the Mount”,<sup>730</sup> where He also spoke much about **what He wanted us to DO.**

We can summarize that last evening's talk by saying **He taught them some very profound things concerning the New Covenant.** Again, if we focus in on just what He commanded – that is, **what He told us to DO** - we see this: *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you **have love for one another.**”<sup>731</sup>*

**So, how does loving one another relate to gatherings? Or better...**

*How do gatherings relate to loving one another?*

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<sup>729</sup> John 13-17

<sup>730</sup> Matthew 5-7

<sup>731</sup> John 13:34-35, Cf. 15:12

Jesus spoke of the kind of love that “washes one another’s feet”<sup>732</sup> – that is, **love expressed through humility and servanthood**. And He spoke of the love of “*friends laying down their lives for one another*”<sup>733</sup> – that is, **self-denying love**.

*Do the activities of a conventional “worship service” demonstrate this kind of love?*

These demonstrations of love are in clear contrast to the spirit of the world. And in a parabolic form, they demonstrate (without words) the gospel – namely, Humanity’s redemption through the Cross of Christ and the cleansing of sin. “... *just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*”.<sup>734</sup>

*Can you see why the Lord would intend for this love – His love – to be demonstrated out in the world?*

The world cannot see our loving one another in a house or building. This kind of love (“an action word”) has to be demonstrated for the world to see – through various activities conducted out in the world. Worship is a lifestyle<sup>735</sup> – that is, a lifestyle of surrender<sup>736</sup> which may be done in private for the most

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<sup>732</sup> John 13:34-35, Cf. 15:12

<sup>733</sup> John 15:12-17

<sup>734</sup> Matthew 20:28

<sup>735</sup> This concept is discussed throughout the articles of The New & Living Way series.

<sup>736</sup> Greek: *proskuneo*, Strong’s # 4352

part, but also a lifestyle of service<sup>737</sup> which is done in public for the most part. It is this lifestyle of loving service – to one another and to those still prisoners to the god of this world – which Jesus was referring to when He said:

*14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”<sup>738</sup>*

I believe the Lord intended this lifestyle of loving service (worship) of His people to “shine before men” - as “*light to the world*”. To exercise this primarily in designated meeting places for the Church is to “*put it under a basket*”. At best, “in-house” activities, by nature of the case, simply nurture a sub-culture to be enjoyed by Christians. At worst, it amounts to nothing more than a Christian country club. But, it is clear, that the Lord intended for the Father be glorified by having His King and Kingdom represented out in the world.

Therefore, while there are certainly “family gatherings”, there are also to be gatherings that have to do with “good works” out in the world, which are

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<sup>737</sup> Greek: *latreia*, Strong’s # 2999 (Romans 12:1)

<sup>738</sup> Matthew 5:14-16. In order for our good works to glorify the Father, they must be done *by the Church, in His name* – not in partnership with the world system, in the name of any socio-politico organization.

representative of and a witness to the King and His Kingdom. So then, what are these “good works”? And ...

*What do gatherings have to do with these “good works”?*

By far, the best writing I have ever come across on the subject of the social ministry of the Church is “*Social Action Jesus Style*” by Larry Christenson.<sup>739</sup> One of the “take aways” I received from this book is this: The Church is to be “a Servant Church”. But it is NOT the “servant” of the world – it is the “servant” of God. The Church has had the tendency to take its leading from the world regarding its involvement in social issues – that is, jumping on whatever “band wagon” that is determined to be “in vogue” for the expediency of the political climate and agendas at any given time. This can leave other social issues, which are just as worthy, totally unaddressed. Rather, the Church should be led by the Spirit in its mission and ministries. And the leading of the Spirit will always be in alignment with the Lord’s Commission of the Church to Represent the King and His Kingdom. Therefore, rather than just “pulling something out of the hat” regarding “good works” and gatherings, we need to consider what Jesus has told us to do – the Great Commissions – and then we will consider what some of those “good works” might be in light of that.<sup>740</sup>

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<sup>739</sup> (1976) The original title was “*A Charismatic Approach to Social Action*” (1974).

<sup>740</sup> It must be noted that doing these “good works” is not the only way we represent the King and His Kingdom, but it is just one of the ways we witness to the world.

## PART II

### The Commission of the Church

- to Represent the King & His Kingdom

*How does gathering relate to the fact that Jesus commissioned us to represent the King and His Kingdom?*

Let's review the Great Commission(s) – that is, what Jesus told us to be doing during the Church Age:

- Preach the Gospel of the Kingdom

- in the Whole World as a Testimony to All Peoples.

(Matthew 24:14; Cf. Matthew 16:13-19; Ephesians 3:10)

- Be a Disciple of the King and His Kingdom

(Matthew 13:52; Cf. 16:13-19)

- Disciple All Peoples (Matthew 28:18-20)

- “Be Engaged in the Matters”<sup>741</sup> of His Kingdom until He returns.

(Luke 19:13) This is the Calling of the Ecclesia. And related to this -

- Do “good works” - out in the world. (Matthew 5:14-16)

Let's look at each of these Kingdom assignments and consider possible implications for gathering.

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<sup>741</sup> I believe the *Apostolic Bible Polyglot* translation here has the most clear meaning of the Greek word, *pragmateuomai*, Strong's # 4231, viz. “to be engaged with a matter”. The KJV, “to occupy”, sounds too military; and the NKJV, “to do business”, and the ESV, “to be engaged in business”, sound too mercenary. (The words, “*with this*”, which would infer the money given to the servants in the parable, is in italics, meaning it is not actually in the Greek text. The meaning, therefore, is “to be engaged with matters” of Lord's household or kingdom. Cf. Luke 19:1.



## **Preach the Gospel of the Kingdom**

in the Whole World as a Testimony to All Peoples

(Matthew 24:14; Cf. Matthew 16:13-19; Ephesians 3:10)

There are various views on the Kingdom of God and/or the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>742</sup> And consequently, there are also various definitions of “*the gospel of the Kingdom*”. It is not within the scope of this particular article to even attempt to give a full treatment to that subject matter. However, there is a short passage in the gospels which gives us the essence of:

- the Kingdom
- the good news about the Kingdom
- what it means to be a disciple of the King and His Kingdom
- as well as the Foundation and calling of the Church or Ecclesia.<sup>743</sup> So, for the purposes of this article, I’d like us to examine Matthew 16:13-19 which I believe encapsulates the “Gospel of the Kingdom” – that message which is to be a “testimony”; and at the same time, shows how all the Great Commissions tie together – or better, ties together the various aspects of one Great Commission for the Church.

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<sup>742</sup> Contrary to some dispensationalists, I do not believe scripture warrants making a distinction between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. Cf. <https://www.gotquestions.org/kingdom-heaven-God.html>

<sup>743</sup> Contrary to what is in vogue today for some, I make no distinction between the Greek word, ecclesia, and its English translation, “church”. When I say “church”, I mean the full and accurate biblical meaning of “ecclesia”. Simply using the Greek word, ecclesia, in and of itself, helps no one understand the biblical meaning. The biblical meaning will always require explanation for the unlearned. Therefore, I think the English words, “church” or “assembly”, are adequate translations.

<sup>13</sup> "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup> And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> I also say to you that you are Peter<sup>744</sup>, and upon this rock<sup>745</sup> I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been<sup>746</sup> bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."<sup>747</sup>

## v. 13

Jesus referred to Himself as "*the Son of Man*". This title is found in the messianic prophecy recorded in Daniel 7:13-14; and was a title given to the coming Messiah. The true Messiah was to be born both fully God and fully human.<sup>748</sup> And, **the Kingdom is like its King – every human being in this kingdom must be born of the Spirit.**<sup>749</sup>

## v.14

The general religious public saw Jesus merely as *a prophet* – playing a prophetic role primarily for the people in the earthly kingdom of Israel by speaking to the earthly power structures about social justice. This prophet

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<sup>744</sup> Greek: *petros*, Strong's # 5586, a stone

<sup>745</sup> Greek: *petra*, Strong's # 4073 , a large mass of rock, bedrock

<sup>746</sup> The Greek verb is in the Future Perfect tense and Passive case.

<sup>747</sup> Matthew 16:13-19; Cf. Mark 8:27-29; Luke 9:18-20

<sup>748</sup> John 1:1, 14; 1 John 4:2

<sup>749</sup> John 3:3-8

was to be a forerunner for the Messiah, who would likewise establish a righteous society in which Israel could dwell in peace and prosperity. It took some time to convince His disciples<sup>750</sup>, but Jesus revealed Himself to be a different kind of prophet – playing a prophetic role primarily for God by speaking forth God’s plans and purposes for His heavenly kingdom. He would also be a different kind of King – a crucified Christ. And His would be a different kind of Kingdom – one which was not of this earthly realm but of the heavenly realm. Therefore the good news of THIS kingdom is not about social transformation, but rather about spiritual redemption.

#### v. 15

Jesus asks each of His disciples for a **personal revelation of Himself**. It has been said: God doesn’t have any grandchildren. The revelations of your “spiritual father” may have some inspirational and educational value; but to be a disciple OF CHRIST, you must have a personal revelation of Him.

#### v. 16

And the essential revelation – the “bedrock” - is that Jesus is BOTH the **King of the Kingdom** (“*the Christ*”) and “*the Son of the Living God*”. If He is a Son, there is a Father. Therefore, along with the Lordship of Christ, one must also understand **the Sonship of Christ**, for we who are IN CHRIST

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<sup>750</sup> Cf. My articles: *Seeing the Kingdom Through the Cross; Who Is This King of Glory?, The Cross & The Powers of Darkness*, available by emailing [AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChrist'sTable@gmail.com)

through faith, are sons **IN THE SON**. **THIS** is the good news of **THIS King and THIS Kingdom**: *“Christ in you the hope of glory” – “We will be revealed with Him in glory”*.<sup>751</sup> Yes, *“He is bringing many sons to glory”*.<sup>752</sup> *“We will be glorified with Him”*<sup>753</sup> – *“the glory is to be revealed to us”*<sup>754</sup> at *“the revealing of the sons of God”*<sup>755</sup> – that is, at *“our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body”*, and the redemption of the whole of this creation.<sup>756</sup> This will take place *“at the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power”*,<sup>757</sup> for He has already *“disarmed the rulers and authorities, made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through THE CROSS.”*<sup>758</sup> **THIS is the good news about the Kingdom OF GOD.**

## v. 17

Jesus indicated that the source of this personal revelation is *“My Father who is in heaven”*. **THIS Father is the “Ancient of Days”**<sup>759</sup>, the **MOST HIGH GOD** who *“judges in the midst of the gods”*.<sup>760</sup> **THIS is the Kingdom OF HEAVEN we’re talking about!**

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<sup>751</sup> Colossians 1:27, 3:4; Cf. 1 John 3:2

<sup>752</sup> Hebrews 2:10

<sup>753</sup> Romans 8:17

<sup>754</sup> Romans 8:18

<sup>755</sup> Romans 8:19

<sup>756</sup> Romans 8:20-25

<sup>757</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:24

<sup>758</sup> Colossians 2:15

<sup>759</sup> Daniel 7:9-10, 13, 22; Cf. Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 44:6.

<sup>760</sup> Psalm 82:1

## vv. 18-19

And Jesus clearly stated ...

- HE would build His Church.
- He would build His Church upon THE FOUNDATION (the “bedrock”) of THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST.
- He would build His Church by REVEALING HIMSELF.
- He would build His Church WITH DISCIPLES – those who had a personal relationship with Him, which was based upon a personal revelation of Him.
- “*The gates of Hades*”<sup>761</sup> would not overpower THIS CHURCH.<sup>762</sup>
- He would give THIS CHURCH “*the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*” – so that it might “be engaged in matters of the Kingdom”.<sup>763</sup>

Again, “*THIS Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all peoples*”.<sup>764</sup> The Greek word translated “testimony” (or “witness”) here is *marturion*,<sup>765</sup> meaning “A DECLARATION OF FACTS”.

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<sup>761</sup> Hades (Hebrew “Sheol”) is the “unseen” realm of the dead. Concerning our redemption from “Death”, see my article, **Some Thoughts on Evil**. Putting Jesus’ words in the context of other scripture, He is referring to both a present and a future victory over Death, “now, but not yet” - the kingdom inaugurated now, but not yet consummated. Cf. “Gospel of the Kingdom” by George Eldon Ladd. Viz. Death will not overpower the Church, because Christ “has abolished Death” 2 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:14; and “will abolish Death”: 1 Corinthians 15:26; Revelation 20:14, 21:4.

<sup>762</sup> Ephesians 3:10. Cf. My article **The Cross & The Powers of Darkness**.

<sup>763</sup> Luke 19:13; Cf. This is the actual meaning, calling of the Ecclesia, which will be discussed shortly.

<sup>764</sup> Matthew 24:14

<sup>765</sup> Strong’s # 3142

Certainly, we need to *gather* for the purpose of TEACHING these “facts” to those becoming disciples of the Kingdom.<sup>766</sup> I would also like to suggest here<sup>767</sup> that we need to *gather* in order to PREPARE before the occasion of making this declaration:

- How – in what ways - can we make this declaration?
- Who – which of us - will be making this declaration?
- When and where will we be making this declaration?
- What materials and equipment will we need to make this declaration?

In Acts 20:27, Luke records Paul as having said he “*declared the whole counsel of God*”<sup>768</sup>. The Greek word translated “counsel” is *boule*<sup>769</sup>; the root meaning is “will”. The NASB reads “the whole purpose of God”. The same word is used in Acts 13:36 – “*David served the boule of God in his generation.*”<sup>770</sup> In Acts 20:27, Paul was speaking to the elders of the church in Ephesus. Therefore, when he uses the phrase, “*the whole counsel (purpose, plan, will) of God*”, we can conclude he is referring to truths recorded in his epistle to the Ephesians – specifically chapter 3, verses 1-12 – where he

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<sup>766</sup> Matthew 13:51-52

<sup>767</sup> And will be discussing in more detail shortly under “Be Engaged in Matters of the Kingdom”

<sup>768</sup> NKJV and ESV

<sup>769</sup> Strong’s § 1012

<sup>770</sup> *Robertson’s Word Pictures of the New Testament*: The counsel of God. If *huperetas*, “having served”, is in the dative case, then: “having served the whole counsel of God in his generation”. But, if *huperetas* is in the instrumental case, and *geneai*, “his generation”, is locative, then: “having served his generation by the whole counsel of God”.

speaks of “*the mystery*” (v. 3), “*the mystery of Christ*” (v. 4) which God “*revealed to apostles and prophets*” (v.5), and that the gospel of Christ was for all peoples in the whole world (v. 6). I believe this term, “*the whole counsel (purpose, plan, will) of God*”, can be equated with “*the gospel of the Kingdom*”, which is to be “*preached in the whole world as a testimony to all people*”. And, this term, “*the whole counsel (purpose, plan, will) of God*”, can also be associated with the commission of the Church in v. 10 – “*to make known the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places*”. “*To make known*” is the translation of the Greek verb, *gnorizo*.<sup>771</sup> It can mean “to reveal” as it does in Ephesians 1:9 and 3:3 & 5. And it can also mean “*to declare – to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places*”. I suggest that **we should gather to seek God and His wisdom as to how to carry out this commission He has for the Church**; and to prepare when and where we are to carry it out, as well as what materials and equipment we may need to utilize.

***We should gather ...***

**TO TEACH THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD<sup>772</sup>  
AND TO PREPARE DECLARATIONS  
OF THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM**

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<sup>771</sup> Strong’s # 1107

<sup>772</sup> Acts 20:27. Spoken to the elders of the church in Ephesus. “Whole Counsel of God” (ESV); “Whole Purpose of God” (NASB, NRSV); “Whole Plan of God” (HCSB, CSB, GWT); “Whole Will of God” (NIV). Greek: *boule*, Strong’s # 1012. The same word is used in Acts 13:36 – “David served the *boule* of God in his generation.” I believe this term can be equated with “the gospel of the Kingdom”; and refers to truths recorded in Paul’s epistles to the Ephesians – specifically chapter 3, verses 1-12 – “the mystery of Christ” (v. 4) which He revealed to apostles and prophets. (v.5). Also: See footnote # 87.

**Be a Disciple**  
of the King and His Kingdom  
(Matthew 13:52; Cf. 16:13-19)

I believe we need to ask ourselves: Is there something amiss, if our main concern has to do with gathering with one another, without being **primarily** concerned with each of us also gathering individually with the Lord? There are exceptions – in both the conventional churches and in the organic churches – but the emphasis I hear coming from both quarters is centered on “being a family”, “having intimate relationships”, “experiencing community”, “practicing the one anothers”, “enjoying fellowship”, “body ministry”, etc. If Jesus were to be asked again today about the greatest and foremost commandment, He would say we have things turned around – we have “the cart before the horse”. These human relationships are good in the “second commandment” category, but act as usurpers in the “first commandment” category.<sup>773</sup> This is Man-centered – NOT God-centered Christianity.<sup>774</sup> The lyrics to a simple old praise song based on Genesis 49:10 tells us what (Who) the Center of Christianity is:

*“We are gathering together unto Him.  
Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be.  
We are gathering together unto Him.”*

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<sup>773</sup> Matthew 22:37-39

<sup>774</sup> Romans 11:36



We all can fool some of the church people some of the time at a church gathering – even in an “organic church” setting, but if the Person of God is not truly preeminent and central in our hearts and daily lives, then I fear this indictment from Isaiah regarding spiritual lip service applies:

*“These people draw near to Me with their words and honor Me with their lip service; but they remove their hearts far from Me, and **their reverence for Me consists of tradition** learned by rote.”<sup>775</sup>*

When vital one-on-one relationship with the Lord is lacking at home, people gather together in public mouthing words that are not heartfelt and go through the motion of exercising customary rituals (even “pentecostal” and “charismatic” ones) lacking authentic reverence, instead of heart-level surrender of spirit, soul, and body. This is the Lord’s response to such gathering:

*“I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies<sup>776</sup>.... They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them.”<sup>777</sup>*

**So, what does authentic discipleship look like?** Who are “*truly His disciples*”? I believe it all centers on **Him** – not on “the one anothers”. “Loving one another” is the **proof** of discipleship<sup>778</sup> – it is not the **process** of discipleship. What is the **process** of discipleship? I believe it all hinges on **personal relationship** with the Lord:

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<sup>775</sup> Isaiah 29:13; Cf. Matthew 15:8-9

<sup>776</sup> Amos 5:21

<sup>777</sup> Isaiah 1:14

<sup>778</sup> “*Bearing much fruit*” is also a proof of discipleship, which we will discuss shortly.

- Jesus asks for a personal revelation of Himself from each of His disciples.<sup>779</sup>
- Jesus told us that disciples are “taught by the Lord” Himself.<sup>780</sup> This happens *“morning by morning”* as disciples learn to hear the Lord and learn to speak what they have heard from Him.<sup>781</sup>
- Jesus said that true disciples are those who are IMMERSED<sup>782</sup> in His word.<sup>783</sup>
- Jesus described His relationship with His disciples as “friends”.<sup>784</sup>

**Disciples are those who GATHER  
one-on-one WITH THE LORD**

*So, how does an individual “gather one-on-one with the Lord”?*

**Through spiritual disciplines<sup>785</sup>**

– namely,

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<sup>779</sup> Matthew 16:13-17

<sup>780</sup> John 6:45; Cf. Isaiah 54:13

<sup>781</sup> Isaiah 50:4. *The Apostolic Bible Polyglot* (Septuagint) translation is amazing: “The Lord, the Lord gives to me a tongue of instruction to know when it is necessary to speak a word. He stood me morning by morning. He added an ear for me to hear.”

<sup>782</sup> The Greek word is *meno*, Strong’s # 3306, meaning stay in, continue in, abide in, dwell in – a particular place. To me, this speaks of being surrounded by His word, so I’ve used the words “immersed in”, as a type of being “baptized” in His word.

<sup>783</sup> John 8:31.

<sup>784</sup> John 15:13-15

<sup>785</sup> *There are many wonderful books on the disciplines. Just some which I have read:* “Practice of the Presence”, by Brother Lawrence; “Imitation of Christ”, by Thomas a’ Kempis; “Celebration of Discipline”, by Richard Foster; “Ordering Your Private World”, by Gordon MacDonald; “Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life”, by Donald Whitney; “Sacred Pathways”, by Gary Thomas; “The Spirit of the Disciplines” and “Hearing God”, by Dallas Willard. For a complimentary copy of teaching notes for a series I have done entitled, “Fellowship With the Holy Spirit”, Email: [AtChristTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristTable@gmail.com)

*Spiritual Disciplines = Fellowship with God*

Spiritual Disciplines are simply ways of having FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD – that is, various praxes for nurturing one’s “devotional life” with a view to spiritual transformation (growth in Christ-likeness). Fellowship with God requires discipline. It is probably for this reason that what some refer to as “holy habits”, have also become known as Spiritual Disciplines. Various authors compile different lists, placing various disciplines in various categories. This is just one example<sup>787</sup>:

**1. The Inward Disciplines**

Meditation / Prayer / Fasting / Study

**2. The Outward Disciplines**

*(Inward Realities Resulting in Outward Lifestyles)*

Simplicity / Solitude / Submission / Service

**3. The Corporate Disciplines**

Confession / Worship / Guidance / Celebration

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<sup>786</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:1. In this case, I am not making any distinction between fellowship with the Holy Spirit and fellowship with the Spirit of the Risen Christ, or fellowship with God the Father for that matter. Regarding “the Eternal Spirit” in Hebrews 9:14, both M.R. Vincent and A.T. Robertson agree that this refers to the Spirit of Jesus, the Christ.

<sup>72</sup> From “Celebration of Discipline” by Richard Foster

## *The Components of Fellowship with the God*

- **Desire**: An absolute pre-requisite, which arises out of a sense of need – specifically, being “*poor in spirit*”,<sup>788</sup> and **love for the Lord**.<sup>789</sup>
- **Discipline**: Not in the sense of self-effort, but simply letting the Lord truly be the Lord of our lives, rather than allowing “the affairs of this life” to usurp His place of preeminence.<sup>790</sup>
- **Direction**: Scripture reading, and study give the proper direction and guidance to our “holy habits” / spiritual disciplines / fellowship with God.
- **Devotion**: “They were continually devoting themselves . . . .”<sup>791</sup> to “holy habits” / spiritual disciplines / fellowship with God.

### *Discipleship Requires*

#### *GATHERING one-on-one WITH THE LORD*

While this is just one aspect of discipleship, it is certainly the main aspect and essence of BEING A DISCIPLE – namely, gathering together “one-on-one” with the Lord Jesus. THE MINISTRY of discipling or “making disciples” of Christ certainly also involves gathering together with others – specifically, those who teach others about revelation, relationship, and reflection of Christ.

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<sup>788</sup> Matthew 5:3

<sup>789</sup> The connection the two is demonstrated in the passage Luke 8:36-47.

<sup>790</sup> Suggested Reading: *Tyranny of the Urgent* by Charles E. Hummel and *Ordering Your Private World* by Gordon MacDonald.

<sup>791</sup> Acts 2:42. Greek: *proskartereo*, Strong’s #4242, steadfastly attentive to, constantly adhering to.

## Disciple All Peoples

*What does Discipling All Peoples have to do with Gathering?*

The Greek word translated “disciple” is *mathetes*,<sup>792</sup> which means a learner, one who is taught.<sup>793</sup> Disciples are taught BY the Lord; and taught ABOUT the Lord by those who disciple others. Many methodologies and models for discipleship have emerged over the years, emphasizing relationship and fellowship with the mentor. Never-the-less, the primary aspect of biblical discipleship is TEACHING. There are obviously different teaching formats, such as a lecture format, and what some might call an “as you go” format.<sup>794</sup> Jesus utilized BOTH in discipling His apostles.

I believe a key aspect of teaching for biblical discipleship is what might be called “apostolic fellowship”. What do I mean by that? An excerpt from my article *Discipleship & The Equipping Ministries*:

*“... He gave gifts to men.... And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as shepherds and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ....”*<sup>795</sup>

“This passage tells us that Jesus gave certain **gifts to men** and gave certain **men as gifts** to the Church. Something that is important for us to

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<sup>792</sup> Strong’s # 31014,

<sup>793</sup> But also, one who follows one’s teachings, an adherent.

<sup>794</sup> The “as you go” format can be seen throughout the gospels. Examples of the “lecture format” would be The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and The Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20-49).

<sup>795</sup> Ephesians 4:7, 11-12. (“as” in the NASB, and “to be” in the NKJV are not in the Greek text.)

understand is this: In building His Church,<sup>796</sup> **Jesus blesses men – not methods.** There may be some value in considering methodologies for how to make disciples; but in the end, Jesus blesses disciples through men rather than through methods.<sup>797</sup> Acts 2:42 tells us that the disciples “were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship....” In his commentary on this verse, John Gill, reminds us that the disciples were also **fellowshipping with the apostles.** The syntax in the Greek text has both the teaching and the fellowship referring back to the apostles. In fact, The Amplified Bible translates it as: *“the instruction and fellowship of the apostles”*. Jesus gave certain **gifts to men** and gave certain **men as gifts** to the Church. The apostle Paul could say to the Thessalonians, *“You know what kind of men we proved ourselves to be....”*<sup>798</sup> What qualifies these men to equip the Church is not their fulfilling the presupposed “job descriptions” of apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, teacher, but rather who they are as ambassadors of Christ<sup>799</sup>. These are men who *“have been with Jesus”*<sup>800</sup>, and bring the presence of Jesus.”

*What does gathering have to do with teaching disciples?*

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<sup>796</sup> Matthew 16:18

<sup>797</sup> This obsession with methodology is typical to the American culture; but the spiritual root is bondage to *“the elementary principles of the world”*, as we have discussed in other articles. But can it also be that this dependence on methods is symptomatic of there being so few truly apostolic men in the Body of Christ?

<sup>798</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1:5 *The Amplified Bible*

<sup>799</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20

<sup>800</sup> Acts 4:13

The context of the spiritual disciplines we've just discussed are those daily one-on-one gatherings with the Lord. For biblical discipleship, the additional context needed in tandem with this are gatherings for teaching and equipping which will “nurture”<sup>801</sup> those one-on-one gatherings with the Lord.

*Discipleship is learning Christ through ...*

Revelation of Christ, and Relationship with Christ, with a view to Reflection of Christ. In the Revelation – Relationship Continuum, teaching on Seeing Christ Throughout All of Scripture has to do with the REVELATION aspect. And a teaching on Fellowship with the Spirit (through various spiritual disciplines)<sup>802</sup> has to do with the RELATIONSHIP aspect.

Biblical Discipleship requires disciples ...

- Gathering one-on-one in relationship with the Lord,
- as well as,
- Gathering for teaching with equipping ministries.<sup>803</sup>

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<sup>801</sup> Or “motivate”, “encourage”, “stimulate”, “inspire”, “grow”, “guide”, etc.

<sup>802</sup> I am not referring to fellowship with one another – I am referring to a disciple’s one-on-one fellowship with the Holy Spirit. It’s true that some of these disciplines can be practiced collectively; but, as with “worship services”, that collective exercise will be shallow, if people do not have an authentic devotional life as individuals.

<sup>803</sup> For a complimentary copy of Laying THE Foundation: A Guide for Teaching Disciples, Email:

[AtChristTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristTable@gmail.com)

Much like the fluidity of the Spirit-led Christian life<sup>804</sup>, the process of discipling a given disciple must follow the Holy Spirit's leading alternating between teachings on REVELATION OF CHRIST and teachings on RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST. Essentially, this series of articles is all about seeking understanding of how to do that "*according to the Spirit*", rather than "*according to the letter*".<sup>805</sup>

Therefore, in addition to all I have written on DISCIPLESHIP and DISCIPLING<sup>806</sup>, I would make this statement: At least some, if not all, of our gatherings need to be for the purpose of discipling.

*Certainly, we gather for the purpose of discipling.*

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<sup>804</sup> Cf. John 3:8

<sup>805</sup> That is, according to the "*new commandment*" of the New Covenant (John 13:35-35, Cf. 15:12) - according to "*the Law of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2), according to "*the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 8:2).

<sup>806</sup> Email [AtChristTable@gmail.com](mailto:AtChristTable@gmail.com) for complimentary .PDF copies of *The Vineyard & The Husbandman, Discipleship & The Equipping Ministries, The Church: A Community for Transformation. Christ Is Pre-Requisite for Church, Doing Church*, et. al.



## Bear Fruit

Jesus said: “*My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.*” That’s something we all certainly want to do. But what is a “fruitful disciple”? We can give that a *spiritual* answer or a more *functional* answer. I think *both combined* would be the best answer. What is “spiritual fruitfulness”? Growing in Revelation of Christ and Relationship with Christ? Yes. Growing in Christ-likeness? Yes, again. But let’s also consider the question in light of the Great Commissions - being fruitful by ...

- **Being “engaged in matters of His Kingdom”<sup>807</sup> until He returns.** (Luke 19:13; Cf. The calling of the “Ecclesia”). And related to this is -
- **Doing “good works” - out in the world.** (Matthew 5:14-16)

*What does that mean?  
And what does gathering have to do with that?*

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<sup>807</sup> I believe the *Apostolic Bible Polyglot* translation here has the most clear meaning of the Greek word, *pragmateuomai*, Strong’s # 4231, viz. “to be engaged with a matter”. The KJV, “to occupy”, sounds too military; and the NKJV, “to do business”, and the ESV, “to be engaged in business”, sound too mercenary. (The words, “*with this*”, which would infer the money given to the servants in the parable, is in italics, meaning it is not actually in the Greek text. The meaning, therefore, is “to be engaged with matters” of Lord’s household or kingdom. Cf. Luke 19:1.

## The Calling of the Ecclesia

Let's establish the context of Jesus' words, "*be engaged with matters (of the kingdom) until He returns*": The nature and commission of the Church is to be the Ecclesia<sup>808</sup> of the Kingdom. W.E. Vine defines this as: "A body of citizens called out and gathered to discuss the affairs of state." He further explains it as "a gathering for a definite purpose, a gathering regarded as representative of the whole nation".<sup>809</sup>

Such a gathering would "*be engaged with matters of the Kingdom*", functioning much like other group meetings with more contemporary names, such as a "task force", defined as, "a unit or formation established to work on a single defined task or activity." Other examples might be: a "Town Hall" meeting, an "Investigative" meeting, a "Project Planning" meeting, a "Work" (Team) meeting. In making these comparisons the essential difference from these contemporary consortiums is that the Ecclesia meetings would not be led by a committee or by a "democratic" process, but rather be led by the Holy Spirit – the "Governor" of the Kingdom. And the task "on the table" is always to represent the King with a witness of the Kingdom – namely...

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<sup>808</sup> Strong's # 1577

<sup>809</sup> Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words. See Acts 19:23-41. Although this was a gathering of people from the world system (who were set against the kingdom of God), this passage does allow us to see the secular Greek *ekklesia* "in action" (albeit against the preaching of the gospel by the apostle Paul). Also: Acts 15:6-29 is a clear and excellent example of the Church functioning as the Ecclesia of the Kingdom of God.

*“<sup>8</sup>To preach to the nations the unfathomable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup>and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; <sup>10</sup>So that the manifold wisdom of God might **now be made known through the church** to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.<sup>11</sup>This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Ephesians 3:8-11)<sup>810</sup>*

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<sup>810</sup> See my article *The Cross & The Powers of Darkness*.

## Be Engaged in Matters of the Kingdom

As I've said, one of the ways we are to "*be engaged in matters of the kingdom*" is by DOING GOOD WORKS – Out in the World.

What does *THAT* have to do with Gathering?

### Disciples and the World<sup>811</sup>

<sup>13</sup> "*You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.* <sup>14</sup> "*You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;* <sup>15</sup> *nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.* <sup>16</sup> *Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*" (Matthew 5:13-16)

### "Glorify Your Father Who is in Heaven"

Something which needs to be clear at the outset of this discussion of "Doing Good Works" – Out in the World: Whatever good we do **MUST** be done in the name of God. Why? In order to "*glorify your Father who is in heaven*": The one that is named, is the one who is credited and glorified. That's so obvious – why do I even bring up the issue? The apostle John made it abundantly clear that everything Jesus did on the earth, He did "in the name of the Father" – so that all that He did would be attributed to His Father, and

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<sup>811</sup> The paragraph heading in *the NASB, Updated Edition*, Lockman Foundation (1996)

so that His Father would be credited and glorified.<sup>812</sup> Jesus did NOTHING in the name of Caesar, nor in the name of the Roman government – nor in the name the nation of Israel, nor in the name of the temple in Jerusalem. Yet, throughout history, Christians have carried on much activity in the name of various religious denominations – for the credit and glory of those religious organizations. Christians have also carried out much activity in association with and under the auspices of secular charitable organizations and government-sponsored social programs.<sup>813</sup> Those doing the work may be children of their Father who is in heaven, but earthly organizations are getting the credit and glory for their work, because it is not being done in His name, under the administration of the Ecclesia.

There is a related issue of “separation”. For our purposes in this article, suffice to let the scripture speak for itself here without commentary:

*<sup>14</sup> “Do not be bound together (lit. unequally yoked) with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? <sup>15</sup> Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup> Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. <sup>18</sup> And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ says the Lord Almighty.”*

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<sup>812</sup> John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28, 45; 12:49; 14:10

<sup>813</sup> A blatant case in point: The Progressive Christian “Social Justice” movement backing the social policies and programs of the Democratic Party in the USA.

Anyone who has engaged in “doing good” in association with and under the auspices of secular charitable organizations and government-sponsored social programs has experienced the inherent spiritual conflicts of opposing worldviews. But the point is NOT that God wants us to avoid these conflicts, NOR that He “needs” to be glorified. This simple point will become more clear as we go along: **We MUST “do good” in His name, because what the Lord is building is His household (His Kingdom) – He is NOT building, or even “repairing” the kingdom of the world.**

### “Let Your Light Shine Before Men”

Jesus said: *“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father....”* But, shortly afterward, He also said: *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them.”* (That is, “doing good” in your own name and receiving the “glory” for it.)<sup>814</sup> So, how do we reconcile His two statements? I don’t think this is problematic: Jesus wants us to display “good works” to the world so that the Father will be glorified - not for us to be noticed by men. I believe there is a connection with the right motivation, and the meaning of the word “good”, as well as with the nature of the “works” He wants to display to the world.

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<sup>814</sup> Cf. Matthew 6:1-5

## “Preach the Gospel. Use Words if Necessary”?

This is a popular quote attributed to Francis of Assisi. While this may be said with a good sentiment intended, there are two problems with this quote: 1) Francis of Assisi didn't say it.<sup>815</sup> 2) It is not biblical: It is preaching which God has chosen to use as His means of salvation.<sup>816</sup> Our works cannot save ourselves, nor anyone else. But **Jesus' work** in His death, burial and resurrection does save people. The gospel<sup>817</sup> is not something we can do – it is something we are commanded to preach. And while it is true that “(our) words are cheap” and “(our) actions speak louder than (our) words”, if applied to the gospel, these sayings denigrate the words of the prophets as well as the words of Jesus and His apostles which are recorded in the inspired scriptures. In fact, these sayings do not apply at all to the gospel – the “word of God”, the “word of Christ”. **The gospel** – the message of Jesus' work of the Cross - **has supernatural power** - *“the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes”*.<sup>818</sup> The scripture does NOT say that “good works” will enable people to call on God, believe on Christ and be saved. (If you have been involved in doing good works out in the world, you will know that from personal experience with non-believers that generally speaking, when the “hand-outs” stop, they stop coming around.) The scripture DOES say

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<sup>815</sup> It is contrary to his reputation – he was well known for his preaching; and was known to have preached up to five times per day.

<sup>816</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:21b “... God was well pleased through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe.”

<sup>817</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:1-4

<sup>818</sup> Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:18

that people will be saved through the preaching of the gospel.<sup>819</sup> If we do not preach the gospel (along with living out its implications), then our “good works” will only point to ourselves instead of to **Jesus**. So, whatever these “good works” are, they do not replace *“preaching the gospel of the kingdom in the whole world as a testimony to all peoples”*.<sup>820</sup> THIS is the calling of the Church - *“to proclaim<sup>821</sup> the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”*<sup>822</sup> And again, I suggest that we should gather to seek God in prayer for His wisdom as to HOW to carry out this commission He has for the Church.<sup>823</sup>

## Showing Our Faith By Our Works

While it is true we cannot preach the gospel without words; it is also true that we should live out the truth of the gospel – even without words. In most translations, Ephesians 4:15 reads: *“speaking the truth in love”*. Yet, Greek scholar, A.T. Robertson, says that the meaning of the Greek word, *aletheuo*<sup>824</sup>, means “BEING truthful” or “WALKING in the truth”.<sup>825</sup> So, Paul is saying that what we do and how we live should be in agreement with the truth of the gospel. James says that what we do and how we live should not

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<sup>819</sup> Romans 10:13-15; 1 Corinthians 1:21b

<sup>820</sup> Matthew 24:14

<sup>821</sup> Greek: *exangello*, Strong’s # 1804.

<sup>822</sup> 1 Peter 2:9

<sup>823</sup> This is the calling of the Church – “to proclaim (Greek: *exangello*, Strong’s # 1804) the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” 1 Peter 2:9

<sup>824</sup> Strong’s # 226

<sup>825</sup> Robertson’s *Word Pictures of the New Testament*



*“lie against the truth”*<sup>826</sup>. In fact, James says that we **“show our faith by our works”**:

**14** *“What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? **17** Even so faith if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. **18** But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and **I will show you my faith by my works.**”*<sup>827</sup>

THAT is what the Lord desires when He says: *“Let your light shine before men in such a way **that they may see your good works** and glorify your Father who is in heaven”*<sup>828</sup> – **SHOWING (EXHIBITING<sup>829</sup>) OUR FAITH BY OUR WORKS.** THAT is the testimony and witness of the gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven.

## “Good Works”

Let’s give some general definition to the term **“good works”**, review the Commission of the Church to Represent the King & His Kingdom, and then take another look at WHY WE GATHER in light of these things. In the phrase **“good works”**,<sup>830</sup> the Greek word translated **“good”** is *kalos*.<sup>831</sup> Greek

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<sup>826</sup> James 3:13-18

<sup>827</sup> James 2:14-18

<sup>828</sup> Matthew 5:16

<sup>829</sup> Greek: *deiknuo*, Strong’s # 1166, to show or exhibit.

<sup>830</sup> Matthew 5:16

<sup>831</sup> Strong’s # 2570

scholar, W. E. Vine tells us this word denotes that which is intrinsically good, fair, and beautiful. Works which are intrinsically good are not motivated by pragmatic or utilitarian purposes – that is, to win popularity with people, or to attract people to the church services, or even to achieve supposed “social justice”<sup>832</sup> goals in society. I believe the particular “goodness” Jesus wants to display to the world for the glory of the Father is the nature and character of the Father God. In a manner of speaking, “doing good works” is doing what God would do, the way in which God would do it, while reminding people no one is intrinsically good except God alone.

Jesus highlighted this in His encounter with the rich young ruler, when He said to him: *“Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone.”*<sup>833</sup> Why did Jesus say that to him? Because this rich young ruler referred to Jesus as, “good teacher” – he did not recognize Jesus as *“the Christ, the Son of the Living God”*, as Peter did<sup>834</sup>. He recognized Him only as a “good teacher”. If Jesus had acknowledged Himself as “good”, then the rich young ruler would have also considered himself able to achieve “goodness”. After all, his attitude was this: “What should I do to be good? Just tell me what to do, and I’ll do it. No problem.” As it was, he still didn’t get the point:

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<sup>832</sup> e.g., The Progressive Christian “Social Justice” movement backing the social policies and programs of the Democratic Party in the USA.

<sup>833</sup> Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-23.

<sup>834</sup> Matthew 16:16

“The righteousness of God is by faith, not by works”.<sup>835</sup> You see, people naturally think “do-gooders” are “good”; but Jesus doesn’t.

THIS IS SUCH A PROFOUND ISSUE! It is the difference between the gospel of “*salvation by grace through faith*” and the “Social Gospel”<sup>836</sup>, which professes the ability of human effort to redeem society through “good works”, quite without the need for the atoning blood sacrifice of “*the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world*”<sup>837</sup>.

How utterly muddled things get when we want people to think we are “good”, or when people mistakenly esteem us as being “good” because we serve the Lord. So, whatever these “good works” are, in doing them out in the world, we must try our utmost to communicate the nature and character

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<sup>835</sup> Romans 3:22, 11:6; Ephesians 2:8

<sup>836</sup> **Peter Abelard (1079-1142)** proposed what became to be known as his *Moral Influence Theory*.<sup>836</sup> In a nutshell, this atonement theory states that Christ died to influence humanity toward moral improvement. This theory denies that Christ died to satisfy any principle of divine justice but teaches instead that His death was designed to greatly influence mankind with a sense of God's love, resulting in softening their hearts and leading them to repentance. Thus, the Atonement is not directed towards God with the purpose of satisfying His righteousness, but towards man with the purpose of influencing him towards a just and moral society. Abelard’s “Moral Influence Theory”, along with Charles Sheldon’s “Christian Socialism” and novel, “*What Would Jesus Do*” (1891), were significant influences on **Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918)**, who is known as the father of the Social Gospel. Rauschenbusch defined sin as betrayal of the bonds of care among human beings. He believed that the root of sin is not rebellious refusal to obey God, but a deep-seated selfishness. He saw selfishness as more than a personal failing – it was a transpersonal evil, institutionalized in social systems that benefit some individuals while exploiting and oppressing many others. Rauschenbusch did not view Jesus' death as an act of substitutionary atonement but in his words, he died "to substitute love for selfishness as the basis of human society." Rauschenbusch also devoted considerable effort to explicating the problem of evil, which he saw embodied not in individuals, but in "suprapersonal entities", which were socio-economic and political institutions. He found four major loci of suprapersonal evil: militarism, individualism, capitalism, and nationalism. To these he juxtaposed four institutional embodiments of good: pacifism, collectivism, socialism, and internationalism. He cited these six "social sins" which according to him, Jesus bore on the Cross: Religious bigotry, the combination of graft and political power, the corruption of justice, the mob spirit (being "the social group gone mad") and mob action, militarism, and class contempt.

<sup>837</sup> John 1:29

of the Father God whom we are called to represent out in the world, while reminding people no one is intrinsically good except God alone.

As for the Greek word translated “works”, it is *ergon*,<sup>838</sup> meaning work in the sense of employment or occupation, indicating more than just a single “act of kindness”. So, somehow, when doing these “good works” out in the world, we cannot give the impression we are offering people “random acts of kindness” with hopes that they will listen to our “sales pitch” and come visit our church. The nature of this “work” is not so much a social event, or even a social program, but rather a calling and a lifestyle, representing our nature and character.<sup>839</sup> These “good works” need to be an expression of God’s love nature, who we are as children of the King, and the character of life in His Kingdom.

## A Lifestyle of Service

Well then, what are these “good works”? I think a good place to start identifying these good works is to understand what it is that the Lord wants the world to see. He wants the world to see HIS LOVE.<sup>840</sup> As we discussed earlier about the “New Commandment” He gave us<sup>841</sup>, He wants the world to see HIS KIND OF LOVE in our lifestyle of service to one another.

Therefore, these “good works” – out in the world – consist of a lifestyle of

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<sup>838</sup> Strong’s 2041

<sup>839</sup> 2 Peter 1:4

<sup>840</sup> John 3:16

<sup>841</sup> See pages 17-21.

service - to those “in the world” as well. The apostle Paul referred to those “in the world” as *“those who are outside”*<sup>842</sup> – that is, **outside “the household of the faith”**. However we express our love in service to one another in the family of God, we should express that same love in service to those “outside the household of the faith” – namely **“Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the LAW OF CHRIST.”**<sup>843</sup>

What is the “Law of Christ”? **The Law of Christ is the governing principle of the New Covenant.** The Law of Christ is loving one another as He has loved us<sup>844</sup> *“according to the Spirit, not according to then letter”*.<sup>845</sup> That is, not according to “the elementary principles of the world”.<sup>846</sup>

In like manner, it is *“not as the world gives peace, but as Jesus gives peace”*<sup>847</sup>. The Hebrew word for peace, *salom*<sup>848</sup>, and the Greek word for peace, *eirene*<sup>849</sup>, both mean wholeness, complete well-being, and harmony. “Doing good works” is more than meeting a particular material need, be it food, clothing, health care, housing, education, etc.<sup>850</sup> – it’s more complete than that. It is *“Social Action Jesus Style”*. As I mentioned earlier, that is the title

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<sup>842</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:12- 13; Colossians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:12; 1 Timothy 3:7

<sup>843</sup> Galatians 6:2

<sup>844</sup> John 13:34, 15:9 and 12.

<sup>845</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:6

<sup>846</sup> Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20.

<sup>847</sup> John 14:26-27. Please note from this passage that this peace that Jesus gives is inextricably connected to the presence of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>848</sup> Strong’s # 7965

<sup>849</sup> Strong’s # 1515

<sup>850</sup> *“Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.”* Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4.

of a work by Larry Christenson. In my own words, I would like to share another “take away” I received from his brilliant treatise, for right here is **the dividing line between the world and the Church – what makes our “good works” different from supporting government social programs – the quintessential difference between the “Social Gospel” and “Social Action Jesus Style” – is namely, THE HOUSEHOLD OF THE FAITH.**<sup>851</sup>

## The Household of the Faith

*<sup>9</sup>“Let us not lose heart in **doing good**, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. <sup>10</sup> So then, as we have opportunity, let us **do**<sup>852</sup> **good to all people, and especially<sup>853</sup> to those who are of the household of the faith.”**<sup>854</sup>*

Why “do good” – especially with, particularly with, chiefly with, and mostly with “*the household of the faith*”? Because God loves us more than those in the world? Because we are more deserving – nicer people? Because “Charity begins at home”? No! It’s because God’s agenda is not the same as the world’s agenda: The world’s agenda is to engineer and transform society, eliminating all its ills – or at least, appear to be doing so – enough for politicians to be re-elected (that is, to buy votes) and keep the populace utterly dependent upon the government. But God’s agenda is NOT to

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<sup>851</sup> What follows about “the household of the Faith” has partially been gleaned from Larry Christenson’s book, “Social Action Jesus Style” – and it is merely gleaned – there is a much fuller treatment of the subject in his book. There are many other things in his book that support all the various points of this article. His book is, by far, the best writing I have come across on the subject of the mission of the Church in the world.

<sup>852</sup> The Greek word is *ergazomai*, Strong’s # 2038, meaning to be engaged with and committed to, work as an occupation. i.e. Not “an act of kindness”.

<sup>853</sup> The Greek word is *malista*, Strong’s # 3122, meaning particularly, chiefly, mostly

<sup>854</sup> Galatians 6:9-10

transform society and eliminate all its ills - but rather to build the Church, “the household of God”,<sup>855</sup> so it can be a witness to and a testimony to A COMPLETELY ALTERNATE SOCIETY<sup>856</sup> - “A New & Living Way” – “here on Earth as it is in Heaven”<sup>857</sup>.

We are to “go into all the world”<sup>858</sup> and work “good works” out in the world, but not to “fix” it. God’s plan is that we would “snatch some out of the fire”<sup>859</sup> before “the elements pass away”<sup>860</sup>, so that they too may be “rescued from the domain of darkness, and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son”<sup>861</sup>, and have eternal life in the new heaven and new earth.<sup>862</sup> **Our work is to cooperate with Jesus as He builds His Church<sup>863</sup> – “the household of the faith”, “the household of God”, and be a witness to, a testimony to, the Kingdom of God.** Rather than “transforming society”, or merely meeting people’s material needs, the Lord’s agenda is that “those who are outside” would “taste of the Lord and see He is good”<sup>864</sup> – experience “the household of God”.

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<sup>855</sup> Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15

<sup>856</sup> Cf. my article, *The Church: A Community for Transformation*

<sup>857</sup> Matthew 6:10

<sup>858</sup> Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8

<sup>859</sup> Jude 1:23

<sup>860</sup> 2 Peter 3:7, 10-13

<sup>861</sup> Colossians 1:13

<sup>862</sup> Revelation 21:1; Cf. 2 Peter 3:10 and 13; Isaiah 65:17, 66:22

<sup>863</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:5-10; Ephesians 4:11-12, 16

<sup>864</sup> Psalm 34:8; 1 Peter 2:3; Hebrews 6:5

## An Experience of the “Oikos of God”

The Greek word translated “household” is *oikos*<sup>865</sup>. The *oikos* was the basic unit of Greek society – the members of a household. It was one’s nuclear family; but more than that, it included extended family, as well as household workers, and anyone else associated with the household. The term also included the whole estate – the house, the land, and the family business. The “Oikos of God” is the family of God, complete with spiritual parents, brothers and sisters, and a network of friendships.

Luke 2:49 contains an interesting phrase, where Jesus says “*I must be about My Father’s house*”<sup>866</sup>. Other translations say, “*I must be about My Father’s business.*”<sup>867</sup> The literal translation would read, “*I must be about the things of My Father*”, or “*I must be about the matters of My Father’s household.*” The phrase, “*household of God*”, goes beyond human relationships into the area of activity – working and serving in the house, studying, and teaching the things of the Father, being about the business of the kingdom of God.

The point is this: The Lord’s agenda for “social action” is that “those who are outside” would experience “the Oikos of God” - tasting, perceiving, seeing, experiencing that “the Lord is good”, including experiencing the

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<sup>865</sup> Strong’s # 3624

<sup>866</sup> NASB

<sup>867</sup> NKJV, NIV



presence of Jesus. Those “outside” need to be given an opportunity to experience the household of God, including the love of the family of God, the depths of the truth of God, the richness of the wisdom of God, the giving and receiving of the various ministries of the Body of Christ, and the adventure of living in the kingdom of God.<sup>868</sup>

## Bearing One Another’s Burdens in the Household of the Faith and “Doing Good” in the World

I’d like to share a couple of other thoughts before leaving this subject. Firstly, let’s combine the opening and closing thoughts Paul gives the Galatians in chapter two: *“bearing one another’s burdens”* and *“especially with those who are the household of the faith”*.<sup>869</sup>

ALL the *“burdens”* of those in *“the household of the faith”* ARE THE SAME BURDENS of those outside *“the household of the faith”* because we are all human beings with universal human needs. All that God wants us to provide **firstly** for those in *“the household of the faith”* CAN ALSO BE AVAILABLE to those outside *“the household of the faith”*.

But to truly co-labor with God in this, we must understand His ways: God said that His people *“always go astray in their hearts not knowing His ways”*.<sup>870</sup> He said this specifically in reference to the spiritual season when He was

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<sup>868</sup> It must be noted that John 3:3 & 5 maintains that one cannot fully “understand” (Greek: *eido*, translated “see”) or enter the kingdom of God without experiencing regeneration.

<sup>869</sup> Galatians 6:2 & 10

<sup>870</sup> Psalm 95:10; Hebrews 3:10 NKJV

leading Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. This is what God intends to do with the Church – lead us out of the “*domain of darkness*” - namely, the world system, and into “*the kingdom of His beloved Son*”.<sup>871</sup> In fact, He “*desires that ALL people would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth*”<sup>872</sup>. But, in order to co-labor with Him in this, we MUST understand His plans and purpose, along with His ways. His intention is more than merely meeting people’s material needs.<sup>873</sup> Along with revealing Himself and His love through His disciples, the Lord’s ultimate intention is to bring those who are outside His house inside His House. I am not speaking of “getting them to come to church”. I am speaking of people repenting – that is, changing their worldview, changing their hearts and lives, having saving faith in Christ, receiving the Gift of the Holy Spirit, and seeing the kingdom, and entering the New Covenant community.

You see, when we “do good” out in the world, the Holy Spirit who “*convince the world concerning sin, and righteousness and judgment*”<sup>874</sup>, will also convince those in the world that THE PROVISION IS IN THE HOUSE. In Luke’s Parable of the Prodigal Son, it says that when the son “*came to his senses*”, he realized THE PROVISION IS IN THE HOUSE,<sup>875</sup> and he returned to his father’s house, confessed his sin, received forgiveness, and “*came to life*

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<sup>871</sup> Colossians 1:13

<sup>872</sup> 1 Timothy 2:4

<sup>873</sup> Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4

<sup>874</sup> John 16:8

<sup>875</sup> Luke 15:17-18a; Cf. vv. 11-32

*again*” (was regenerated).<sup>876</sup> THE PROVISION IS IN THE HOUSE. The apostle Paul indicated that *“the riches of the glory of His inheritance is IN THE SAINTS”*<sup>877</sup> – IN THE NEW COVENANT COMMUNITY.

### *What Does the New Covenant Community Look Like?*

What have we concluded thus far regarding gatherings of the Ecclesia informs us of what a New Covenant community looks like:

- Equipping ministries discipling people through their teaching and fellowship.<sup>878</sup>
- In tandem with this, individual disciples devoting themselves to fellowship with the Holy Spirit.
- Disciples of the Kingdom<sup>879</sup> seeking the Lord (in prayer) for His guidance<sup>880</sup> in making declarations of the Gospel of the Kingdom in the whole world and discipling all peoples.<sup>881</sup>
- Teams of workers making preparations for declarations of the Gospel of the Kingdom.
- And I believe we can add: Disciples having meals together in each other’s houses.<sup>882</sup>

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<sup>876</sup> Luke 15:18b-24

<sup>877</sup> Ephesians 1:18 I realize and agree that GOD’S INHERITANCE is “the saints”. But Paul is praying here for the church to understand God’s PROVISION FOR THE SAINTS. He is not praying for God’s “eyes to be enlightened so that He will know the hope of His calling and His inheritance”.

<sup>878</sup> e.g. Acts 2:42

<sup>879</sup> Matthew 13:52

<sup>880</sup> See Part III of this article, *Seeking God in Prayer for Guidance*

<sup>881</sup> e.g., Acts 2:42

<sup>882</sup> e.g., Acts 2:46

- Practicing the Presence of God together.<sup>883</sup>
- Praising God as a lifestyle (rather than a religious ritual).<sup>884</sup>
- Beyond this, being generally “*engaged in the matters of the kingdom*” and “*bearing one another’s burdens*” in the household of God and “*doing good*” out in the world.

Some thoughts about “*bearing one another’s burdens*”: Just as ancient Israel was an alternative covenant community; the Ecclesia should be the center for –

- Health Care
- Education
- Financing (without interest)
- Legal cases between believers (1 Corinthians 6)
- Supporting the businesses of other believers (Cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)<sup>885</sup>

Some thoughts about “*doing good*” out in the world: Christian groups have historically been the builders of –

- Hospitals (physical health care and “*renewing of the mind*”<sup>886</sup> as psychological counseling)
- Schools (“*renewing of the mind*” to a biblical worldview)

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<sup>883</sup> e.g., Acts 2:43

<sup>884</sup> e.g., Acts 2:47

<sup>885</sup> Each of these ministries deserves a separate article for further discussion.

<sup>886</sup> Romans 12:2

- Centers for learning life skills
- Various types of charity missions<sup>887</sup>
- Centers for the support of the Arts

## Some Related Exhortations from the New Testament

- Philippians 2:4 *“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*
- Hebrews 13:16 *“Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”*
- James 1:27 *“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”*
- 1 Timothy 5:3-4, 8 *“Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.... Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*
- 1 John 3:17 *“But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”*

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<sup>887</sup> e.g., Acts 2:44-45; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Cf. 1 Corinthians 16:1; Hebrews 13:16

## PART III

### Seeking God in Prayer for Guidance

for “Being Engaged in the Matters of the Kingdom”  
and Doing “Good Works”

The astute reader would have noticed that I have not given any “practical applications” for “doing good works”. I don’t have any to give – God does. **We must seek God in prayer for guidance.** When I speak of “seeking God in prayer for guidance”, it can be equated with “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit”<sup>888</sup>. Reflect on how Jesus described the ministry of the Holy Spirit towards us who are His disciples:

*<sup>25</sup> “These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. <sup>26</sup> But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, **He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.**” John 14:25-26*

*<sup>12</sup> “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup> But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, **He will guide you into all the truth;** for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and **He will disclose to you what is to come.** <sup>14</sup> He will glorify Me, for He will take of*

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<sup>888</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:1.

*Mine and will disclose it to you. <sup>15</sup> All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore, I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.”* John 16:12-15

**It is imperative we hear the voice of God for guidance in the work of God. We dare not continue building “according to the letter”<sup>889</sup> – according to “the elementary principles of the world”.<sup>890</sup> As His co-workers<sup>891</sup>, we must work with Him and not against Him. Our example is Jesus, and how He walked with the Father while He ministered on the earth – saying only what he heard the Father saying and doing only what He saw the Father doing.<sup>892</sup> There is a prophetic passage which addresses the necessity of CO-LABORING WITH THE LORD IN HIS WORK:**

*“Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.”* Isaiah 50:10

We must have reverence for God and His work, having humility and acknowledging when we don’t know what God is doing. We must have utter dependence on the Lord. Not “*trusting in chariots and horses*”<sup>893</sup> – “*Not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit*”.<sup>894</sup>

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<sup>889</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:6

<sup>890</sup> Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20.

<sup>891</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:9

<sup>892</sup> John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28, 45; 12:49; 14:10

<sup>893</sup> Psalm 20:7

<sup>894</sup> Zechariah 4:6

<sup>11</sup> *“Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who gird yourselves with firebrands, walk in the light of your fire and among the brands you have set ablaze. This you will have from My hand: You will lie down in torment.”* Isaiah 50:11

If we “do our own thing” in our own strength,<sup>895</sup> we will suffer the consequences.<sup>896</sup>

Over the years, a number of scripture passages have become especially significant for me when seeking God in prayer for guidance in the work of ministry:

- *“The people who know their God will display strength and take action.”* (Daniel 11:32; Cf. Jeremiah 9:23-24)
- *“Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”* (Jeremiah 33:3)
- *“A ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the messengers (angels<sup>897</sup>) of God were ascending and descending on it.... This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven.”* (Genesis 28:12; 17)
- *“Let Your work appear to Your servants and Your majesty to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; and confirm for us the work of our hands; yes, confirm the work of our hands.”* (Psalm 90:16-17)
- *“I will build My Church ... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matthew 16:18-19)
- *“So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants, and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are”*

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<sup>895</sup> Psalm 118:8; 146:3; Isaiah 2:22; 30:1

<sup>896</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:13-17

<sup>897</sup> Greek: *angelos*, Strong’s # 32.



God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building." (1 Corinthians 3:7-9)

- "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." (John 6:29)
- "Our father who is in heaven, hallowed be you name. Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:9-10)

It's natural that we might have a desire for "practical applications" of the principles I've laid out regarding **"Being Engaged in the Matters of the Kingdom"**. As I said, we **MUST** receive those leadings in prayer with the Holy Spirit. And, of course, the New Testament scriptures would be our "go-to" source from which we would affirm the trustworthiness of those Spirit-leadings. I have, in fact, listed above some principles (not "patterns"). And, along that line, I'd like to repeat what I said at the close of the previous section entitled **The New Testament Scriptures (PART I): The "descriptive" / "prescriptive" paradigm is not satisfying to me, as I see the whole idea of prescriptions of certain activities as being at the very core of *"the elementary principles of the world"*<sup>898</sup>. And again, it is not the activities themselves which are problematic, it is the prescribing of those activities which I perceive as *"of the letter"* and therefore violating the essence of the New Covenant by promoting a ministry *"of the letter"* rather than *"of the Spirit"* – *"the Law of Christ"*, *"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus"*. I am more of the persuasion to say, in a manner of speaking: **Whatever we see in the New Testament scriptures that is descriptive of Christ is prescriptive.** I believe it was the intention of the Holy Spirit and the**

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<sup>898</sup> Galatians 4:3, 9; Colossians 2:8, 20.

authors He inspired to both describe and prescribe CHRIST through the New Testament scriptures.

This brings to mind an oft used phrase: “What Would Jesus Do?”<sup>899</sup> THAT is what we need to discern in every unique situation – What would Jesus do? – “according to the Spirit”<sup>900</sup> For THAT is essentially the governing principle of the New Covenant – “the law of Christ”<sup>901</sup> - “the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus”<sup>902</sup>. Of course, the guidance we receive “*according to the Spirit*” will never contradict anything the Spirit inspired to be recorded in the New Testament scriptures. But at the same time, it may be “*far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think*”<sup>903</sup> – that is, something “*no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined*”<sup>904</sup>. I say this because, Jesus said “*the Spirit will guide us in ALL THE REALITY*”<sup>905</sup>. While Greek word, *aletheia*<sup>906</sup>, is usually translated “truth”, its literal meaning is “reality”. In fact, Greek scholar, Hermann Cremer, defines it as, “the reality lying at the basis of an appearance; the manifested, veritable essence of a

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<sup>899</sup> The origin and usage of the phrase: It is the theme of “Imitation of Christ”, written by Thomas a Kempis in 1481. The phrase was repeated a number of times in a sermon given by Charles Spurgeon in 1891. Also, in 1891, A.B. Simpson wrote a hymn with this title. The phrase was the title of a novel written by Charles Sheldon in 1896, whose theology was labeled “Christian Socialism” and was the primary influence on Walter Rauschenbusch, the father of the “Social Gospel”. (I do not identity with their use of the phrase.) In the 1990s, Janie Tinklenberg, a youth leader in the Calvary Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan, used the phrase which started a global youth movement.

<sup>900</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:6

<sup>901</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2

<sup>902</sup> Romans 8:2

<sup>903</sup> Ephesians 3:20

<sup>904</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:9 ESV

<sup>905</sup> John 16:13

<sup>906</sup> Strong’s # 225

matter”<sup>907</sup>. **THAT’S** what Jesus would do – in every unique situation we encounter between now and “the end of the age”.

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<sup>907</sup> *Biblico-Theological Lexicon*

# The Nature of New Covenant Gathering

From surveying the Scriptures, walking in the New Covenant - in both our individual and collective lives - seems to involve:

- **Knowing God**  
(Jeremiah 31:33; 9:24)
- **Being Born of the Spirit**  
(John 3:3-8; Romans 8:9)
- **Being Led by the Spirit**  
(Romans 8:14; Cf. John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10)
- **Being Governed by** (in both our individual and collective lives):
  - **“The Law of Christ”** (1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2)
  - **“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 8:2)
  - **“According to the Spirit”** (2 Corinthians 3:6)

*How does the “New and Living Way”<sup>908</sup> Jesus opened for us relate to the nature of New Covenant Gathering?*

*“... not forsaking our own assembling together....”<sup>909</sup>*

This phrase, verse 25 of Hebrews 10, appears in the very same context as the subject matter of the passage – *“a new and living way”* (v. 20). The Greek verb translated *“assembling together”* is *episunago*.<sup>910</sup> Every time this word appears in the New Testament, the context and reference is Jesus

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<sup>908</sup> Hebrews 10:20

<sup>909</sup> Hebrews 10:25

<sup>910</sup> Strong's # 1997

gathering with His people - either the Lord expressing His desire to gather with His people<sup>911</sup>, or the Lord's people gathering together with Him in the air.<sup>912</sup> Thus, the primary object of "*our own assembling together*" is Jesus, and not one another.<sup>913</sup> Jesus confirms this the one time He mentions our gathering together:

*"Where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."* (Matthew 18:20)

This is the conventional translation of the verse; and the conventional interpretation is that, if we gather together, Jesus has promised to honor our gathering with His presence.

But let's look deeper into a more literal translation of this verse: "*Where there are two or three are being gathered together (or even, "are being led to gather together") in My name, there I am in the midst of them.*" The tense of the Greek verb is present participle, passive voice.<sup>914</sup> Thus the gathering is being initiated by Someone other than "*the two or three*" – that is, "according to the Spirit".

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<sup>911</sup> Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34

<sup>912</sup> Matthew 24:31; Mark 13:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:1.

<sup>913</sup> In Mark 1:33, the people of a city gathered at the door of a house Jesus was in. In Luke 12:1, a multitude of people gathered to listen to Jesus. Cf. Peter Ditzel's article, "*Hebrews 10:25 - What are We Not to Forsake?*"

<sup>914</sup> The verb, *sunago*, is a combination of Strong's # 4863, *sun*, "together" and Strong's # 71, *ago*, "led"; i.e. led together'

The Holy Spirit, the “Governor” of the Kingdom, leads as to when, where and how the Kingdom Gathering (Ecclesia) takes place – “in the name<sup>915</sup> of Jesus”, that is, with the AUTHORITY of Jesus – according to “the Law of Christ”, “the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”.

Also: There is a definite article in front of “in”<sup>916</sup>, indicating into a “place”. The literal translation would be: *“are being led together into My name”*. In other words, the Name of Jesus is a “place” – a spiritual place – His presence, which we gather into. Proverbs 18:10 tells us that: *“The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runs into it and is set on high.”* It is *“the secret place of the Most High”*.<sup>917</sup> THIS is some of what it means to be “IN CHRIST”.<sup>918</sup> And being IN CHRIST is the essence of the New Covenant - *“in whom we live and move and have our existence”*. (Acts 17:28)

The Father has ...

*“given Christ as a covenant to the people  
and  
as a light to the nations”<sup>919</sup>*

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<sup>915</sup> Greek: *onoma*, Strong’s # 3638, meaning authority, character, name.

<sup>916</sup> Greek: *eis*, Strong’s # 1519

<sup>917</sup> Psalm 91:1-2; Cf. Exodus 33:21-23; 2 Samuel 22:2-3; Psalm 18:2; 61:3.

<sup>918</sup> There are many lists of the truths of being “in Christ”. Here is one good example by Ken Boa: <https://kenboa.org/spiritual-formation/who-does-god-say-i-am/>

<sup>919</sup> Isaiah 42:6

Bill & Frances Furioso  
~ At Christ's Table ~



Bill and Frances have been married for more than 40 years, and have two children, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. Being an avid student by nature, Bill has done formal study in various fields including Education, Music, Philosophy and Theology. Bill and Frances served as missionaries in South Africa for thirteen years helping to establish churches and train church leaders. Their Bible teaching ministry has taken them throughout the United States, as well as to other countries like Brazil, England, and Zimbabwe. They have pastored several churches, and as an itinerant Bible teacher, Bill has ministered in hundreds of churches on four continents. As a writer, he has authored many publications which are distributed to church leaders worldwide. Bill and Frances have ministered together speaking in churches, leading spiritual formation seminars, personal mentoring, and administrating an international partnership of church leaders. Because of Bill's disabilities resulting from a spinal cord injury, their ministries of writing, recording, distributing, mentoring, and correspondence are now primarily via the Internet... [www.AtChristsTable.org](http://www.AtChristsTable.org)

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