



# **Christian Bible Centre**

## **MODULE 2 BT 200 3 CREDIT HRS**

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# BT 201

## SALVATION

### DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Salvation is the means by which God, through Christ, saves man from the penalty of sin and gives him eternal life. This process includes one's calling, repentance, baptism, justification, receiving of the Holy Spirit, life of faith and obedience, and final birth into God's Kingdom as a spirit being. Salvation is a freely given gift from God through grace, with our ultimate reward given according to our works.

*Matthew 16:27; John 3:16–17; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8–9; Hebrews 6:1–2*

### DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The goal of every Christian is to be saved from the death penalty of sin through the sacrifice of Christ and to receive the gift of eternal life in God's family and kingdom. This goal and process by which it is attained is called salvation. It is the ultimate purpose of life and the explicit reason why mankind was created. God created man in His image and after His likeness. But the creation process will not be complete until mankind is perfected spiritually—has perfect godly character created in him—and actually enters the God family. God initiates this process by “calling” a person—opening his mind to understand, grasp, and be convicted by the truth of the Bible. It is impossible for anyone to come to Christ unless the Father calls him (Jn. 6:44), and God's calling “depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy” (Rom. 9:16). If one responds to the realization of God's truth by believing it, committing oneself to it and by acting upon it, God will grant him the miracle of true repentance (Rom. 2:4). Repentance is the state of mind that an individual attains through seeing and acknowledging his past sinful way of life and by recognizing he has broken God's laws (Rom.

3:23; 1 Jn. 3:4), resolving to do so no longer. Repentance includes both a deep (“godly”) sorrow over past wrongs (2 Cor. 7:10) and a steadfast determination to change the whole direction of one's life from disobedience to obedience of God. It is accompanied by a profound realization of the need for forgiveness and the help and strength from God to change it. Once a person has repented and professed a sincere faith in the person, message, and sacrifice of Christ, he may be baptized by total immersion for the forgiveness of sins. This baptism is a type of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, which is our means of reconciliation to God (Rom. 5:10) since He paid the death penalty for our sins. Baptism symbolizes the death and burial of one's old sinful way of life and the beginning of a totally new spirit-led life of obedience and submission to God (Rom. 6:3–6; Col. 2:12–13). After baptism the new convert receives the Holy Spirit through the ceremony of the “laying-on-of-hands” ceremony performed in accordance with the commands and examples of the apostles (Acts 8:12–17; 19:5–6). God's Spirit is an absolute necessity for the spiritual creation process of salvation as it serves many functions. It begets one as the son of God; it strengthens him to face trials and tests, to overcome problems, and to build godly character; and it converts and changes the person's whole direction of mind from being carnal to being spiritual (Rom. 8). As such, the Holy Spirit is the seed of eternal life within us that, at the resurrection, will transform our mortality to immortality and clothe us with eternal life (Rom. 8:11; 2 Cor. 5:1–5). It is the Christian's guarantee of eternal life, which can only be negated by willful neglect or deliberate rejection. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is clearly the focal point of the salvation process. He was “put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). We “were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Rom. 5:10) and are thereby justified through faith in that reality (Rom. 5:1). Yet salvation must go beyond justifying the past; it must continue into the future throughout one's life (Rom. 3:24; Titus

3:4–7). The true Christian is admonished to “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). Indeed, the active participation of Jesus Christ in one’s life through His Holy Spirit is absolutely essential for ultimate salvation. As Romans 5:10 concludes, “much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” In Scripture, there is a key point about the salvation process that some people may not want to see. Scripture says about Jesus, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). There is only one path to salvation, and the one path is not “living a good life” or being a good person. Nor is it Buddhism, Islam, or any other religion. Only by accepting Jesus’ sacrifice can one be saved—He is the only way! Romans 14:10–12 points out that every knee will bow to Jesus, since all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Jesus will show every other religion and philosophy to be empty where salvation is concerned. Truly, every human will be given a chance to realise that while we were sinners, Jesus gave his life for us—to give us a path to salvation (Rom. 5:8) and powerfully show God’s love for all mankind. This whole salvation process is by “grace” (Greek “favor”—Eph. 2:8)—it is unmerited and freely given by God and cannot in any way be earned. The Christian totally depends upon God’s grace, initially for the forgiveness of past sins and sins he may commit subsequent to baptism (Rom. 3:24–26; 8:1). Nevertheless, the individual must meet certain criteria in order to be given this free gift. First, the person must live by and grow in faith—a total and real conviction. One must have faith that God exists; faith that He will perform all of His biblical promises, including that of granting him salvation (Rom. 4); faith that the death of Jesus Christ will pay the penalty for one’s sins and reconcile him to God; and faith that the resurrection of the living Jesus Christ will enable him to attain eternal life. Furthermore, a Christian must not be disobedient, since continual sin that is not repented of disqualifies one from God’s

kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9–11). Salvation is surely not earned by obedience, because salvation can in no way be earned (cf. Rom. 4:4). However, Christ’s response when asked what must be done in order to be saved was that the commandments must be kept (Mt. 19:17). Furthermore, Christ told His disciples, at the resurrection He shall “reward every man according to his works” (Mt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12). The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 also illustrates why obedience and good works are necessary. Although salvation is a freely given gift (and hence is “by grace”), our individual responsibilities within God’s family and kingdom shall vary according to the way we have lived our lives since baptism. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 shows plainly we will receive responsibilities in direct proportion to the way we have conducted our lives with the God-given talent we’ve been given. Today, relative few are responding to God’s calling, but now is not the only day of salvation. Every human being who has ever lived shall have an opportunity for the greatest free gift that could ever be imagined. God wants all mankind to receive the opportunity for salvation (1 Tim. 2:4) and is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). To this end, God is infinitely patient and has appointed a time for every human that has ever lived to be called by Him and given the ultimate opportunity of eternal life in the family of God. In summary, salvation is by grace, through faith; it’s not earned by obedience but is dependent upon obedience, with the degree of our ultimate reward determined by our works. This salvation process is one that demands our continuance in God’s way and necessitates our endurance to the end (Mt. 10:22; 24:13). Only when that process is complete and we have been finally born as spirit beings into the family of God shall salvation be complete and totally achieved.

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Project, including the section on “Repentance and Baptism,” which includes the subject of “Salvation.”

## FAITH

### DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Faith is the absolute sure knowledge that God exists and that He will accomplish those things He has promised. Faith in God—trust in His promises and belief that He is in overall control—is a major characteristic in the Christian life and is absolutely necessary for salvation.

*Romans 1:17; 10:17; Ephesians 3:17; Hebrews 11:1–2; James 2:22–24*

#### DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

“The just shall live by his faith.” These words were uttered first by the prophet Habakkuk and quoted three times by the apostle Paul. Living faith is at the heart of true Christianity. It is absolutely essential for salvation (1 Pet. 1:5-9). Christ described faith as a weightier matter of the law (Mt. 23:23). Paul listed it among the three greatest Christian virtues (along with hope and love). Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Far from being simply a feeling in his heart, the Christian’s faith motivates his entire pattern of living. Faith functions as the fulcrum of true Christian thought and behavior. The two distinct meanings of the word “faith” are found in the English translation. When preceded by the definite article (“the faith”) it means the overall system of doctrine and belief accepted by the Church, and by extension, the Church itself (Acts 6:7; 13:8; 14:22). When used without the article it means “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1), which perhaps is the clearest biblical definition of faith. Faith is an absolute belief that God exists and a total trust in His statements (Heb. 11:6). Ultimately, faith deals with God’s promises— with

the future. It is the trust in “things not seen.” Of course, belief cannot be blind. It must be built on genuine conviction. It has to come from perceiving God’s hand in creation, His work in history, and the experience of His fulfilled promises in one’s own life. This is the foundation of faith. But one does not need faith in what has already been accomplished. Therefore, faith is the willingness to believe God will not fail even though He has not actually fulfilled what is promised (Heb. 11:1). True faith must come from God and has many facets, though the primary ones relate directly to Jesus Christ. Faith in its simplest but most profound manifestation is a deep personal belief in Jesus Christ, that He is our Savior, and that His death paid the individual penalty for our personal sins. Faith is having full confidence in the message Jesus brought. This faith in Christ is the belief that leads us to baptism. (Baptism is merely an outward symbolic expression that we have inward faith in Christ.) Paul speaks of this faith in Galatians 2:16 when he remarks we “have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ.” After baptism, one receives God’s Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. At this point Christ, through the Spirit, lives in us and empowers us with a growing and internalized godly faith. Since faith is not self-generated, but is rather the faith of Christ’s Spirit in us, it is termed the “faith of Christ” (subjective genitive). It is this faith of Christ that we must express and live by in every facet of life. But faith is not an end in itself. It is rather the vehicle by which we may obtain salvation. Of course, salvation cannot be earned—either by obedience or faith—for nothing man can do would obligate God to grant salvation had He not decided to give man this gift by His own volition (and according to certain terms). But God has obligated Himself to grant salvation if one has living faith. God says the presence of this faith is counted as righteousness in His eyes and indeed justifies us before God (Rom. 4:1–7). Faith is the motivator that causes us to live godly lives. One who has real belief and hope in God’s promises will

demonstrate this fidelity by his actions and obedience. Indeed, “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). The true Christian will obey God and do good works, for “faith without works is dead” (Jas. 2:20). Our good works do not save us, but they do demonstrate faith. James wrote, “I will show you my faith by my works” (Jas. 2:18), directly contradicting the notion that faith can maintain an exclusively mental/spiritual existence devoid of any physical action and behavior. One who does not obey God is said to possess “dead” faith, a trait no better than that of the demons who themselves believe God exists but refuse to obey Him (Jas. 2:19). Real and true faith will compel a Christian to action. To have real living faith does not mean one will never doubt. Doubt is a normal human characteristic and emotion, and even the truly begotten Christian is not immune from it. Yet we must contest doubt, not by deluding ourselves but by rehearsing reality. We should return to the fundamentals of biblical belief, to our first love, by thinking thoughts and doing the works we did when originally converted. Doubt should not undermine faith, for true faith can surmount doubt. God commands, “the just shall live by faith” in every facet and area of his life. One must fully live by faith, because God made promises that affect virtually every part of man’s existence. He has promised to help us in trials if we are faithful and to answer every prayer that is prayed according to His will and in faith. These expressions of faith are again not ends in themselves. Actually they are secondary when compared to a Christian’s main thrust of faith, which is the belief in God’s promise of the salvation by the resurrection from the dead. Other areas of faith are important, but only as they contribute to our faith in the resurrection, which underscores eternal life. Paul says one who does not earnestly hope for the resurrection has “faith in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14), because if we have no hope of being resurrected, then we have no hope at all! It is a Christian’s faith in the resurrection from the dead that provides a powerful motivation to his earthly actions. It is this faith and

hope that encourages, motivates, and compels the Christian to press onward toward this salvation in spite of trials and disappointments. God’s ultimate design is to bring every human being from the human level to the divine level— from flesh to spirit—from a temporary physical existence to an eternal spiritual existence. This is the foremost frontier of faith. It involves the development of character by implementing the use of trials and a variety of experiences in our human life. God’s promises for the “good life” on the physical level are always subordinated to His ultimate purpose of fulfilling His main promise on the spiritual level—because, for God, it is all about our spiritual development. Jesus makes a powerful statement about faith that puzzles some Christians today. “So Jesus said to them, ‘...assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you” (Mt. 17:20). We believe Jesus, because we know that “with God all things are possible” (Mt. 19:26)! We also know that God is working out His plan here on earth and that not everything we humans want is good for us, or good for fulfilling God’s plan in our personal lives. For example, we see that Paul was not healed though he had prayed for healing (2 Cor. 12:7); and yet, Paul explains that God had a purpose for this “thorn in the flesh”—it was to prevent him from being “exalted above measure.” Millions of people pray that they would win a lottery; yet Scripture says it is hard for a rich man to enter God’s Kingdom, because cares for riches can choke away one’s time and relationship with God. A loving God will not destroy His child by giving him foolish or excessive things that would corrupt him. Perhaps one of our greatest statements of faith is expressed in the request, “Thy will be done” (Mt. 6:10), which shows God that we trust His wisdom and vision of what is best for us. Faith that moves mountains can be hyperbole, and it can be metaphor, and perhaps someday there will be a mountain in the way, and God will grant one of his

children to move it “from here to there” just to demonstrate what faith in God can really do. A Christian who is living by faith realizes physical promises may be delayed for his spiritual benefit, but he knows his life is absolutely in God’s hands and is assured that God has our best interests at heart. Some by their faith have been delivered, while others by the same faith have been martyred (Heb. 11) or allowed to die without seeing the ultimate fruit of their endeavors in this life. Only God knows why these differences occur. We have no choice but to allow God those prerogatives. “Faith” in Galatians 5:22 should be translated “faithfulness.” The “fruits” are produced in the lives of people who have the Spirit. The Spirit does not infuse any of these fruits within us; we produce them by following the Spirit’s instructions, which are spelled out for us in the Spirit-inspired Scriptures. The faith required for salvation is our own faith; it is not a gift that is supernaturally infused within us (there is a special gift of faith—1 Cor. 12:9—but that’s different from “saving faith”), though God may use and even cause events in our lives to bring us to belief in Him and His promises. Faith should never be static but must compel and be active, expecting, constantly growing and expanding in every aspect and area of life. This faith may be built and grow in different ways, through experience, through trials (Rom. 5:1–5), by reading the inspired Word of God (Rom. 10:17), through interaction with the faith of others, etc. Faith must be constant, unfeigned, based upon true promises, without time limit, consistently growing and being exercised, but always vigilant in guarding against drawing back (Heb. 10:38). The Bible spotlights and illustrates how the faith of the patriarchs and people of God throughout history are examples of encouragement to us. We are told of Abraham, the father of the faithful. We are reminded of Enoch, Elijah, Samson, Jephthah, David, and the prophets. We see the awesome example of Jesus Christ Himself, who gave up and willingly surrendered His exalted position as God, emptied Himself into a human form, and was

sacrificed in faith, so that He could become the Savior of mankind after the Father resurrected Him. Likewise, we look at the examples of the apostles and of fellow brethren who were martyred for the sake of Jesus Christ. Finally, we learn that God will grant these faithful men salvation and eternal life in God’s kingdom, because they believed they would receive it, and because they had real faith. They will receive the reward they hoped for, because they believed that God existed and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). Our task is to follow their example, endure in faith until the end, and receive this same reward.

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## REPENTANCE

### DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Repentance is the act of acknowledging one’s sins and resolving to fully obey God. To repent means to change one’s overall attitude from wanting to go one’s own way and instead wanting to go God’s way. It begins when God opens one’s mind to see oneself in comparison with God and His law. True repentance is the first step toward reconciliation with God, and thereby ultimately toward salvation.

*Acts 2:38; 3:19–21; 8:22; 1 John 3:4*

### DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Repentance signals the start of a changed and godly life. It involves a fully conscious recognition of one’s sinful, lawless way of life, a way of life naturally antagonistic toward God and His law, accompanied by a firm conviction to make a total change and to begin to live in full accord with God’s way of life as described in the Bible. True repentance can occur only when God Himself opens one’s eyes to see his

past sinfulness by granting repentance (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). But repentance is much more than recognition of personal sins. Rather, repentance is the process through which God leads us so that we can become progressively more like Him, thereby proceeding toward salvation as sons and daughters in His divine family which is God's ultimate desire for all humanity. As such, repentance should include the positive, joyful realization of the fact that it is God who grants repentance, that this repentance is unto life" (Acts 11:18), and that all who are so called shall "come to know the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25). True repentance is a complex and deeply personal phenomenon that can only be understood, in the final analysis, by experiencing it. The first component is the realization that there is a vast difference, a great gulf, between God and oneself (e.g. Job 42). The next aspect is an all-consuming desire to close that gap, to become more like God in character, thought, and behavior, though the capacity to accomplish this is far beyond human power alone and requires the active involvement of God's Holy Spirit. One who is coming to repentance must first understand that sin is the transgression of God's law (1 Jn. 3:4), the penalty for which is death (Rom. 6:23). Added to this general definition of sin must be the deep personal realization that one has indeed sinned and his whole frame of mind and attitude of approach is oriented against God's law (Rom. 8:7). But the deceitfulness of sin can blind one from seeing one's sinfulness unless God opens one's mind. God's Spirit works with our mind/spirit to help us to recognize our sins and the need for repentance. The blindness results from practicing the shutting of one's eyes to one's own sinfulness. "Their eyes they have shut!" (Mt. 13:14–15). This habit can lead to the inability, or at least a seriously compromised ability, to discern right from wrong. Therefore, genuine repentance must come from God Himself, and man cannot claim credit for it, though he has a part in it. Clearly, his part is to acknowledge the truth about himself which God has revealed and then to act upon it. In the process of

seeing himself, he comes to realize the human "heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). Since sin ultimately starts in the mind, he also begins to understand his own righteousness—which in an unconverted person is invariably motivated by selfishness—is considered by God as a "dirty rag" (Is. 64:6). When an individual repents, he must compare his righteousness to God's righteousness and not to that of other human beings. When man compares himself to God—and with God's help sees himself as he really is—he is astonished at his own sinfulness and inadequacy. Confronted with this reality, the person nearing repentance comes to appreciate that man is incapable of leading a godly life without God's direct help and intervention through His Spirit. "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). While man's intentions are often the best—he may want to do good—nevertheless, he finds himself caught in a struggle between them and his natural inclination toward evil. Romans 7 describes this struggle: "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I... For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (vv. 15–18). A person who is repentant feels a strong need for help in this spiritual dilemma and reaches out to God for aid through His Holy Spirit. Thus, Paul admits that the only relief from this eternal conflict between the good of God and the evil of our own nature is "through Jesus Christ" (v. 25). In his natural state without God's Spirit, man is cut off from God and indeed at enmity with God (Rom. 8:7; Is. 59:1–2). The story of Adam and Eve is an example of how this spiritual enmity occurred in man (Rom. 5:12). The Genesis account indicates that Adam and Eve were born morally neutral, with the ability to do good or evil, right or wrong, but without an actual inclination toward either. God nonetheless instructed them in His law and explained to them right from wrong. They

had no reason to doubt God or disobey until Satan materialized in Genesis 2 as a nachash (a whispering spirit, an enchanter), tempting them by saying God was both holding back knowledge from them and lying about death as the penalty for disobedience. Adam and Eve chose to obey Satan rather than God and ate of the forbidden fruit. The effects of this sin cut them off from God as is evidenced by His thrusting them from the garden. It also caused them to rationalize, thereby blinding them to, their sin, illustrated by Adam's attempt to justify himself. Likewise, their act of stepping from the realm of moral neutrality to that of sinfulness through the initiation of this one sin caused deep and profound mental changes in Adam and Eve. They were no longer morally neutral but instead evilly oriented in much the same way as was—and is—Satan, since Satan's attitude of mind had now influenced their own. All human beings are, like Adam and Eve, born morally neutral. Yet living in Satan's world, surrounded by an ungodly environment, eventually everyone will sin, as did Adam and Eve. (To ask at what age or to try to discern the demarcation line between moral neutrality and sin is not practical.) Thus, sin has the same consequences in us as it did in Adam and Eve. It cuts us off from God, blinds us to our own sinfulness, and changes our minds from neutrality to enmity toward God (Rom. 8:7). Viewed in this context, repentance is the bridge between a carnal mind, one that is at enmity against God, and a spiritual mind, one that has God's Spirit and is obedient and pleasing to the Creator. When one repents, he sees for the first time in his life the ungodly, debilitating, wicked orientation of his natural mind; he asks God for forgiveness and is baptized. He then receives the Holy Spirit which, working in and through his mind, actually changes or "transforms" it from carnal to spiritual (Rom. 12:2). This transformation is called "conversion." And repentance is the bridge—the first step—in this process of transformation. Although repentance involves seeing the sinful side of oneself, which

generates negative feelings, it nevertheless has extremely positive aspects. Upon true repentance and baptism, one is forgiven of sin. The psalmist said, "Blessed is the man to whom sin is not imputed" (Ps. 32:2). The sheer joy of having one's sins forgiven is the sure knowledge of being right and clean before God. King David bore testimony to the positive, uplifting nature of repentance when he prayed, "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which though hast broken [as a result of my sin] may rejoice" (Ps. 51:8). One who has repented can rejoice at the impending forgiveness of his sins, it is joy indeed. The most profound evocation of real repentance in the Bible must truly be this heartfelt prayer of David in Psalm 51. The occasion was Nathan the prophet's coming to him about his sin with Bathsheba. The prayer shows the important basic components of godly repentance: an attitude of abject wretchedness and contrite humility before God; a deep recognition of all one's sins, which are "ever before me"; the conviction that God can and will forgive an individual's iniquities and cleanse him from all his sins; and finally, the sure knowledge that God can and will create in a truly repentant individual "a clean heart" and put "a new and right spirit" in him, restoring "the joy of your salvation." "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment" (Ps. 51:1–4). "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit" (Ps. 51:9–12). Unquestionably, Godly repentance must be accompanied by "godly sorrow." Godly sorrow



reflects a profound awareness that one has sinned against God. It is a sorrow that is felt because sin hurts others and works against God's master plan of salvation. It is this "godly sorrow" that produces a repentance that leads to salvation" (2 Cor. 7:9–10). On the other hand, God also speaks of "worldly sorrow." Worldly sorrow is not sorrow that one has committed sin, but just a momentary feeling brought on by adverse consequences such as results after one has been caught and is being punished. It is temporary self-pity, in no way involving permanent change from sinning to obedience, and its end is death. True repentance, conversely, is a deep-seated desire to change one's whole being. It is a desire to reform and redirect one's motivational approach to life. It is coming to abhor sin as God does. This type of repentance can come only from God. As we have seen, it is God who must give and lead one to repentance (Rom. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25). In a more detailed way, repentance includes many things. It involves a profound sense of utter helplessness, realizing that to do what must be done is impossible by one's own willpower. It requires the conscious awareness that God must take an active part in redirecting and reshaping one's life, for only God knows the way to life and only He can solve the problems of mankind. We must come to realize this fact and accept the process by which we can become acceptable to God. We have to change from doing things our own way to acknowledging God, His will and His laws in our lives. This means a desire to change our very hearts and minds. We have to turn from our way of lust, greed, selfishness, and self-centeredness to God's way of mercy, generosity, love, and outgoing concern for others (Eph. 4:22–24). We can view this as a spiritual "mind transplant." We have to adopt new ways of thinking, new feelings and attitudes (2 Cor. 5:17). Repentance, however, is not designed to create total uniformity of personality, tastes, interests, life styles, etc., among Christians. Such would be an anathema to God, who is creating true sons in His family, not the proverbial "rows of

yellow pencils." Repentance, in fact, is the means by which human beings can grow to have the same overall attitudes and character of God. This is the overwhelmingly uplifting result of godly sorrow. Paul lists seven attributes of this godly sorrow. "For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter" (2 Cor. 7:11). This type of sorrow generates real repentance which will lead to salvation. Real repentance is a spiritual gift, and only God can give it. Acts 11:18 informs us that "God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life." How does God grant people "repentance to [eternal] life"? By seeing to it that they hear the gospel. One cannot change (repent) unless one knows what to change from/to. It's a "spiritual" gift in the sense that this gift of repentance (which comes by way of the gospel) pertains to spiritual things—things like eternal life. Human remorsefulness, even accompanied by great emotion, is not the repentance the Bible says is a prerequisite for baptism and salvation. Consequently, an individual desiring to be converted must ask God for a repentant attitude of mind as well as for forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. This conscious act of asking God is an essential part of the process. As is commonly known, true repentance must be followed by water baptism, which results in the forgiveness of one's sins by God and the consequent reception of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands of the ministry. Although one's initial act of repentance occurs prior to baptism, repentance is not a one-time event—it must be a continuous lifelong process. The more one learns about God and His way, the more one becomes aware of how far he must go to be like God. As a converted individual seeks God's way and reads God's Word to receive personal correction, so his inner sinful attitudes and motivations are perceived. This continuous process of growth and change is the very essence of the Christian life. As God opens his

mind to see more clearly (even more than before baptism) his sinful nature, the Christian repents more profoundly. His post-conversion repentance is a continuous reaffirmation of his commitment to live God's way as well as being contrite and remorseful for any errors made. Repentance is not synonymous with perfection. A repentant person is not guaranteed a sinless life for ever after. Even a converted person will sin out of weakness from time to time, but he need only repent of that sin and confess before God, acknowledging Christ's atoning sacrifice once again, in order to restore contact with God and to obtain God's full forgiveness which reestablishes the joy of righteousness. Such a repentant person knows God shall completely forgive all his sins upon repentance. He knows God has willed to actually forget (cease to think of or consider) all our iniquities once they have been repented of and put under Christ's blood. "As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:12). God "forgets" our sins by no longer associating them with us. This is the incredible promise of real repentance—real freedom: freedom from guilt and fear, freedom from anxiety and depression, freedom from sins, freedom from eternal death. It is the reason why true repentance is the most encouraging, beneficial gift God can give us. It is with this confidence that the Christian continues to suppress and overcome his human nature with God's help. He asks God to replace his ungodly thoughts with the godly approach of the Holy Spirit; he seeks to diligently understand God's law more comprehensively through the practical experience of obedience. God emphatically warns—and it should not be taken lightly—that "it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold Him up to contempt" (Heb. 6:4–6). This shows that anyone wilfully

rejecting God by adamantly refusing to follow His way cannot be coerced into repentance and cannot be forced to receive eternal life. Yet, diametrically contradicting the unfortunate concept of a harsh and vengeful God is the astonishing, thrilling biblical truth that all who want to repent can repent at any time, for any sin, with the full assurance of God's total and immediate forgiveness through Jesus Christ our Savior. God does not want any human being to perish "but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). In summary, repentance involves a change of one's whole way of life and frame of mind from disobedience and antagonism toward God to obedience and love toward God. It is the bridge that takes one from worldliness to godliness, from wickedness to uprightness, from the way of "get" (selfishness, self-concern, vanity) to the way of "give" (selflessness, outgoing concern, service). All this is only possible through God's Holy Spirit already working in the lives of thousands of Christians. God's gift of repentance is a great miracle that shall eventually work in the lives of billions around the world.

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## BAPTISM

### DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The ceremony of water baptism is performed by immersion for the forgiveness of sins upon true repentance and acceptance of Christ's sacrifice. After this ceremony, and as a result of the laying on of hands, one receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Baptism symbolizes the renunciation of the past sinful way of life, the burial of the old man in a watery grave, and the emergence of a new Spiritled man

living with Christ's mind and following in His footsteps.

*Matthew 3:13–16; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:1–8; Colossians 2:12*

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The New Testament stresses great importance upon the ceremony and symbolism of water baptism. It is a deeply-meaningful initiatory rite referred to in Hebrews 6:1 as one of the foundational doctrines of the Christian belief. John the Baptist is the one who introduced water baptism as a ceremony through which one outwardly demonstrates his inward attitude of repentance and desire to submit to God.\* Christ placed His stamp of approval upon John's baptism by setting the example of undergoing the ritual Himself (Mt. 3:13–17). The Father likewise expressed His favor with Jesus' baptism by saying through an angel immediately afterwards that Jesus was His beloved Son in whom He was "well pleased" (v. 17). Jesus' disciples continued to baptize like John until the death and resurrection of their master, when the practice took on newer and deeper significance. (John's baptism did not make available the Holy Spirit—it was a baptism only unto repentance. Later we have an example which shows the necessity of rebaptism in the name of Jesus because some had undergone only the baptism of John—Acts 19:1–6. Also illustrated and stressed in this narrative is the importance of the laying on of hands. This is further substantiated in Acts 8:14–18, where individuals were baptised in the name of Jesus, but without hands laid on them.) In Matthew 28:19–20, Jesus commanded that the apostles go into all nations preaching the gospel and baptizing disciples into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They followed Christ's command stressing the importance of baptism and carefully explained its meaning in their preaching and teachings. Acts 2:38 is a fundamental scripture in this regard: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ

for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." This clearly explains one must be baptized in order to have his sins forgiven so he may receive God's Holy Spirit through the laying-on-of-hands ceremony (Acts 8:12–17). There is no salvation through any other person or savior than Jesus Christ. The Bible says, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The Scriptures tell us that Jesus baptized more disciples than John (John 3:22; 4:1). But in actual fact we find it was not Jesus that did the work of baptizing these people, but it was His disciples that did it for Him (John 4:2). When the repentant believers were baptized, they were baptized "in the name of Jesus"—in other words, by His authority. When you do anything in another's name you do it by his express permission. The disciples of Jesus did the baptizing for Him, by His authority and in His name, and that was the same as if Jesus actually did it Himself. Ministers of Jesus Christ do all things in His name (Acts 10:48). \* We know that at one time baptism accompanied circumcision as a means of entry into Judaism for the proselyte. This would explain why the Jews who came to John's baptism seemed to already have some familiarity with the rite. In Matthew 28:19, we find repentant believers are to be baptized "in" the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The inspired Greek word translated "in" is *eis*. This word actually means into. The one who is baptized becomes the possession of, and comes under the protection of, the one whose name he bears. Therefore, Matthew 28:19 should be translated: "...baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." It is done in the name, by the authority, of Jesus Christ. When God's ministers baptize in the name of Jesus Christ, they are not baptizing the baptismal candidate into any humanly devised organization or denomination, but into the very God Family, into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The main prerequisites for water baptism are repentance and belief (i.e.,

faith) in the person and message of Jesus Christ. Repentance includes godly sorrow over one's past sins and wrong way of life and a deep conviction to obey God. To believe in the person of Jesus Christ means one believes Christ was indeed the Son of God, Savior, and Messiah. In Acts 8:37 it is noted Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch upon his declared conviction, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." But this general belief about the person of Jesus Christ must be more specific before baptism. One must come to acknowledge, accept, and desire Christ as his personal Savior—he must fully and deeply believe Jesus' death on the cross was to pay for his (the sinner's) own, individual sins. Thus, the faith in Christ required for baptism is much more personal than merely a general belief in God or a theoretical understanding (however accurate) of New Testament theology. One who has this faith in Christ and His sacrifice will demonstrate his true conviction and belief by his actions. He will begin to obey Christ, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 7:21). Peter said, God will give His Holy Spirit only to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). The apostle James also makes it abundantly plain that faith and works go hand in hand (Jas. 2:16 ff). In addition to having belief or faith in the person of Christ, one needs belief or faith in the message of Jesus Christ which is the gospel. It would make no sense to believe Christ was the Savior yet disregard His message. Christ Himself commanded that all repent and believe the gospel (Mk. 1:15). So those who want to be baptized must not only be convinced of Christ as Savior of the world and Savior of their own personal life, but he must also believe the gospel. In every way this faith points "toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). Before baptism one must be deeply aware of the significance the act of baptism will have on one's life. He must understand baptism symbolizes a break with the old way of life and demonstrates a full commitment and determination to

begin a new way of life—that of obeying God. One who is baptized can never go back to the old way, or else he stands in jeopardy of losing out on eternal life and consequently being consumed in the lake of fire. One who is considering baptism should carefully "count the cost" that he has the depth of conviction and fortitude to put Christ first in his life, even before family and friends (Lk. 14:25–33). Upon such true repentance and faith, a representative of Jesus Christ can baptise the person. The baptism is by complete immersion in accordance with the many New Testament examples of baptism and with the meaning of baptism itself. There is only one proper method of baptism described in the Bible. The word "baptize" comes from the Greek word baptizo, which means "immerse," "dip," "plunge into," or "put into." Many churches today practice baptism by sprinkling and pouring, even though the Greek words which normally indicate these actions are not used when referencing baptism in the New Testament. Usage of the time indicates the word has its classical meaning of "immerse." Complete submersion in water is the proper way to picture death and burial, which Romans 6 explains is a major symbolic meaning and illustration of what it is to be baptized correctly (see below). In addition, the mode used by John the Baptist and Christ's disciples illustrated there must have been a physical similarity in their general baptismal procedures. The scriptural descriptions of certain baptisms reinforce that the method was total immersion. Christ was baptized in the Jordan, and upon baptism, came out of the water (Mt. 3:13–17); John baptized in Aenon because there was "much water" there (Jn. 3:23); Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch travelled in the chariot until they came to waters in general, and both went down into the water (Acts 8:36–39). Finally, proof is found in the biblical meaning of baptism, analogous to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. One must be totally immersed in water to symbolize being buried with Christ in a watery grave (Rom. 6:3–6; Col 2:12). Peter drew the analogy between baptism and the flood

in which only a few people were saved through water (1 Pet. 3:20): “And I cannot help pointing out what a perfect illustration this is of the way you have been admitted to the Christian ‘ark’ by baptism, which means, of course, far more than the mere washing of a dirty body: it means the ability to face God with a clear conscience” (Phillips). Baptism actually does far more than remove figurative dirt from the body, which means the removing of sin from our spiritual record—it also actively gives one the ability to face our Creator with a clear conscience. The RSV translates this verse slightly different, amplifying the intrinsically rich meaning: “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (v. 21). Baptism in fact does both: it gives the repentant sinner both “the ability to face God” and is “an appeal to God.” But this ability or appeal for a clear conscience can only be through the resurrection of Jesus Christ; “For there is in every true baptism the virtue of Christ rising from the dead” (verse 21, Phillips). Water baptism is the most important (of the very few) New Testament ceremonies or rituals commanded by Christ and followed by the apostles and early New Testament Church. It is, essentially, the formal initiatory rite to Christianity and is replete with profound spiritual significance and rich personal meaning for every true Christian and prospective member of God’s kingdom. The biblical injunction of water baptism is an outward sign showing an inward attitude of repentance and faith toward Jesus Christ, and is the only way by which an individual can receive God’s Holy Spirit which makes him part of the body of Christ. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body [the Church], whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). Baptism pictures and symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:2–6; Col. 2:12–13). Baptism is also symbolic of the repentant believer’s own death, burial, and

resurrection from a watery grave, as already noted. In Romans 6 Paul explains that just as Christ died for mankind’s sins and was buried, baptism—being plunged into a watery grave, as it were—is symbolic of the death and burial of one’s old sinful life. And as Christ was resurrected in newness of life, when a person comes up out of the waters of baptism, it is symbolic of his rising up out of his past “grave” to live a new life free from the guilt of past sins and secondly, the death penalty those sins incurred (Rom. 6:23). “How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Rom. 6:2–8). Paul explains again in slightly different terms the same principle in Colossians 2:12–13: “...and you were buried with Him [Christ] in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith and the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God hath made alive together with Him...” Paul adds in Colossians 3:1 that since we have symbolically risen from the grave with Christ, we should set our orientation of mind on spiritual things instead of carnal, physical things. “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above...” Of all the symbolic and deep spiritual meaning associated with baptism, there remain four fundamental reasons why a person should be baptized: to follow Christ’s example, to have one’s sins forgiven, to receive the Holy Spirit, and, lastly, to be changed from mortal to immortal. In his sermon on

the day of Pentecost, Peter clearly stated that one is baptized to have his sins forgiven. He clearly explained Christ was the Messiah and in killing Christ the people had killed their Savior. “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and unto the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter’s response was that they should “Repent and be baptized...for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (verse 38). This clearly proves one is baptized because he wants to have his sins forgiven and covered by the shed blood of Christ. In addition to his own baptism “with water unto repentance,” John the Baptist made a brief reference to two further uses of the concept of baptism; referring to Jesus Christ, he said, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Mt. 3:11). To be baptized with the Holy Spirit shows a Christian must be “immersed” in it. The baptism of fire refers to the lake of fire which will totally “immerse” and burn up unrepentant sinners at the end of this age. John the Baptist compared those who will not obey God to “chaff” (v. 12) which would be burned up by Jesus Christ instead of being gathered to Himself as will the “wheat”—referring to Christians who obey God (Mt. 3:11–12; 13:24–30; Luke 3:16–17).

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## LAYING ON OF HANDS

### DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The laying on of hands is a ceremony performed by God’s servants on special occasions such as for receiving God’s Holy Spirit after baptism, at ordination, anointing of the sick, and for other special purposes. It symbolizes one’s submission to God and

unity with the Church, which is God’s instrument on earth.

*Matthew 19:13–15; Acts 6:5–6; 8:17–18; 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14; Hebrews 6:2*

### DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Hebrews 6:2 identifies the laying-on-of-hands ceremony as one of the fundamental doctrines of the Church. It is an old and important religious ceremony with both the Old and New Testaments being replete with examples of its use. The “laying-on-of-hands” is the act of one person in religious authority putting his hands upon the head of another for a blessing, a special religious office, or for some other conferred spiritual gift. It is usually accompanied by a prayer that delineates the nature of the spiritual blessing and asks God to grant it to the individual. The significance of this act is to display the individual person is being set apart for a spiritually related reason. It confirms he is being acknowledged as qualified and responsible for a particular task or being given a blessing out of the ordinary. As such the laying on of hands is often a public ceremony performed in front of members of the congregation. The act of laying on of hands has special symbolic meaning. It shows that God works through fallible human beings when administering church government. When a servant lays his hands upon a person to confer the spiritual blessing or gift, he does so as an agent or representative of God fulfilling a position of spiritual authority within the Church. Likewise, one who submits to this ceremony during ordination, after baptism, during anointing for healing or under any other special circumstances is acknowledging the authority God has placed in the Church and ministry and shows submission to this authority. The servant, of course, is not an agent of God on his own, but only through the Church. He does not administer his own authority but only that of the Church as empowered by God. The servant does not confer anything of his own by the laying on of

hands, but instead, symbolizes what God confers. The earliest examples of using this ceremony are found in the Old Testament. Jacob laid his hands upon the heads of Ephraim and Manasseh to pass along the birthright promises of nationhood God made to his grandfather, Abraham (Gen. 48:13–20). When God chose a physical priesthood, they were set apart for their holy duty by the laying on of hands. Only a tribe specially consecrated by this special ceremony could officiate in God’s temple (Num. 8:9–11, 14–15). Likewise, Joshua had hands laid upon him, showing God had set him apart to become the new ruler of Israel (Num. 27:18–19). The New Testament shows through command and example various times when the church should use the laying on of hands. It is most often used for conferring the Holy Spirit upon a person after baptism in accordance with Acts 8:15–17 and other scriptures. At this time the servant places his hands upon the head of the newly baptized individual and prays, asking God to give the new convert His Holy Spirit. It is through this ceremony that a person is set apart as a chosen, begotten son of God. James 5:14, Mark 16:18, and other scriptures show how God’s servants should lay hands upon and anoint with oil those who come to them requesting God’s divine healing for their sicknesses. Again the act symbolizes that God will set aside the person for special consideration or attention and illustrates unity and interdependency within the Body of Christ. Another application of the laying on of hands ceremony is during the ordination of elders, deacons, and deaconesses. All these offices are positions of authority, function, and responsibility within the Church. Ordination by the laying on of hands is God’s way of setting apart and conferring upon a human instrument a role of service to God. (This implies the individual has learned how to serve God faithfully—Acts 6:6; 13:3.) The Church also uses this ceremony traditionally in the blessing of little children in accordance with the example set by Jesus in Matthew 19:13–15. God’s servants on special occasions place their hands upon, and ask God’s

blessing for, small children who have never before undergone this blessing ceremony. It symbolizes the child’s sanctification by God for special physical protection and spiritual blessings. During the marriage ceremony, the officiating minister of the Church of God places his hands upon the joined hands of a couple while they kneel with him in prayer. The symbolism of this act portrays the couple’s call on God to enter their marriage and set them apart as special to Him as well as to each other. They are also making a covenant with God to follow His laws. The laying on of hands is a simple but deeply symbolic ceremony which has special application in special circumstances as explained above. It is of critical importance to Christianity, because it shows God works and deals with mankind through other human beings whom He chooses and sets apart for His purpose, though they are fallible and imperfect.

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“mystery” in the New Testament—was preached and explained by Christ, then by His church; it shall be established on earth for a thousand years following Christ’s return, and shall be completely fulfilled when New Jerusalem and God the Father come down out of heaven to dwell on the new earth.

*Mark 4:11; Revelation 5:10; 20:4; 21:1–3, 7, 10*

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Kingdom of God is, in its most narrow sense, the immediate family of God, presently composed of only two persons (the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ). In a more general sense, it includes every being and thing that is under God’s sovereignty, governmental control, and influence. Within this definition, the entire universe can be considered under God’s sovereignty and part of His empirical Kingdom. However, prophetically, the meaning of God’s Kingdom is much more specific. It is the world-ruling government of God set up on earth at Jesus Christ’s return. Christ, together with the resurrected saints, shall rule over all nations and peoples. More specifically, the spiritual Kingdom of God shall comprise only the spiritual members of this world government—the born again, spirit-composed sons of God who rule with Christ as resurrected members of His family over the physical earth during the thousand year period (Rev. 20:4) and eventually over the entire universe. This spiritual Kingdom of God is the goal of all true Christians (Rev. 5:10). The story of the Bible, in a very real sense, is the actual record of God’s working with man so he might learn to understand, obey, and, qualify for entry into God’s Kingdom and family. The gospel of Jesus Christ is (or includes) the gospel of the Kingdom of God. The message about the future establishment of the Kingdom is a subset of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is central to the story of the Bible and to each of the annual holy days, which picture God’s plan of salvation for mankind, including the promise of the Kingdom of God. The Old Testament prophets

## BT 202

## KINGDOM OF GOD

## DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The Kingdom of God is the family of God ruling as the government of God. It is a future world-ruling government to be set up on earth by Christ at His return, with Jesus as King and the resurrected spirit-composed saints in positions of co-rulership with Him. The Kingdom of God—referred to as a



spoke at great length concerning that Kingdom (Isa. 2:1–5; Mic.4:1–5; Zech. 14). “It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob: that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isa. 2:2–4). Likewise, the patriarchs envisioned it and waited for it as “strangers and pilgrims” (Heb. 11:13) on this earth, since they knew God’s government would replace man’s. They sought this Kingdom just as many men might seek a land—country or homeland—of promise (Heb. 11:14–15). “These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city” (Heb. 11:13–16). Jesus Christ was a member of God’s family, of the Godhead, and hence of God’s Kingdom, from eternity. But He divested Himself of His Godhead and authority to become human, in order that He might announce the coming Kingdom of God and qualify as its chief executive officer, as both King and Lord. Jesus—the primary messenger of the coming Kingdom and heir to its throne—was in a sense the personification and embodiment of that Kingdom on earth during His physical lifetime and ministry. This is why He stated, “The time is fulfilled,

and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk. 1:15). The Kingdom of God was indeed “at hand” because Jesus Christ, as its King and Lord, was right there. Jesus clearly spelled this out when He mentioned His being among them was equal to the Kingdom being in their midst. “Being asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God was coming, He answered them, The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, Lo, here it is! or there! for behold, the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Lk. 17:20–21). The message of “good news,” or gospel, which Jesus brought to this world also has, as its focal point, the announcement of the coming Kingdom of God, the description of how it shall be established on earth and the explanation of how mankind might enter it as sons of God. Christ, through His death and resurrection, became the “firstborn” member of this prophetic spiritual Kingdom. Interestingly enough, the apostle Paul remained faithful to this subset of the gospel he preached near the end of his life (Acts 28:23, 31). Christians who follow in the footsteps of Jesus’ life will likewise follow in the reality of His resurrection. They shall be raised from death to rule with Him in His Kingdom (Rev. 2:26–27). By this process, God shall increase or build His divine family and spiritual Kingdom from the present two members to an innumerable multitude (Rev. 7:9). In one sense, those begotten of God’s Spirit are part of the Kingdom of God already, since they actually have the essence of that Kingdom, God’s Holy Spirit, dwelling within them. Furthermore, Christians today, like Jesus during His physical human life, are representatives of that Kingdom since they, like Jesus, shall be kings and priests. Paul wrote that God “has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13), indicating that Christians are already considered part of God’s Kingdom. Obviously, no human being can really be a part of God’s Kingdom since “flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable” (1 Cor. 15:50);

this must wait until the resurrection when “the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality” (v. 54). Paul is just reiterating what Jesus Himself told Nicodemus. “Jesus answered him, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to Him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born? Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn. 3:3–7). No description of the Kingdom of God would be complete without reviewing the parables of the Kingdom that Jesus spoke during His ministry. For his disciples and those whose eyes and ears were open, Jesus revealed that the Kingdom would start small and grow (parable of the mustard seed and parable of the leaven). He spoke of the great value the Kingdom message has for those who find it (parable of the pearl of great price, parable of the hidden treasure). In the parable of the sower, Jesus explains how some people will accept God’s invitation and message, while others will not because of Satan’s deception. Sadly, there are many distractions like persecutions and lusts of the world taking priority in the lives of so many. Finally, also, in the parable of the growing seed, Jesus encourages us not to be discouraged if our labour seems fruitless, because even when we sleep, God oversees growth in ways we might not know, to ensure a harvest in God’s timetable. Much confusion has arisen about the Kingdom of God because of human reluctance to take the term “kingdom” literally. The prophet Daniel was very clear in his statements to Nebuchadnezzar that the Kingdom, which God would eventually set up, would actually be a kingdom on earth in the same literal sense as previous world-ruling kingdoms. “And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a Kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to other people. It shall break in pieces these kingdoms and bring them to an

end, and it shall stand for ever” (Dan. 2:44). Scripture reveals that God’s Kingdom on earth is indeed to be a kingdom in every sense—having territory, laws, subjects, and rulers. At Christ’s return the saints shall be resurrected, changed from physical flesh into glorious immortal spirit beings. “But we would not have you ignorant brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:13–17). The resurrected saints shall sit with Christ on His throne (Rev. 3:21), and rule under Christ on earth with power over the physical nations. “...and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth” (Rev. 5:10). “He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations” (Rev. 2:26). Additionally, God’s Kingdom shall have two parts: the ruling body of spirit beings and the physical nations under that government and control made up of physical human beings. This combined physical-spiritual Kingdom shall replace man’s governments. It shall conform to God’s laws, statutes, and commands and over a period of time introduce and establish His way of life in every nation and culture. The entire fabric of society shall be eventually changed and reformed to comply with the precepts and concepts of God Almighty. It shall be a government that allows all human beings to lead a happy, healthy, prosperous life. All persons alive at that time shall have an opportunity to be saved and have God’s Spirit living in them. God shall make a

new covenant with His people through which He shall change mankind's very nature by writing His law in man's heart. "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the LORD, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:31–34). In God's Kingdom, warfare shall finally be eradicated and the implements of war shall be turned into farm tools because "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9). "It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us His ways and we may walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken" (Mic. 4:1–4). Christ shall judge with "righteousness" and "decide with equity for the meek of the earth"—indeed the whole earth shall be dramatically altered

by the loving leadership and authority of Jesus Christ—even the nature of wild animals shall be changed. "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of His roots. And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what His eyes see, or decide by what His ears hear; but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth, and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of His waist, and faithfulness the girdle of His loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; Him shall the nations seek, and His dwellings shall be glorious" (Isa. 11:1–10). Food and drink shall be in abundance (Isa. 25:6), the lame shall walk, and the nations who were previously staunch enemies shall live at peace. Israel, Egypt, and Assyria shall even set the example of peace and godly harmony for others to follow (Isa. 19:23–25). Throughout this time, many humans shall be entering God's spiritual Kingdom and family. Using Israel as the example, God's spiritual laws for worshipping Him shall be taught to, and followed by, all nations. "From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the LORD" (Isa. 66:23). "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations

which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles” (Zech. 14:16–19). Biblical revelation has very little description of daily life during the thousand-year period. Although Micah’s description mentions every man shall sit under his own vine and his own fig tree (Mic. 4:4), this should not lead us to conclude the only food available will be grapes and figs. Likewise, we should not conclude that the Kingdom of God will be a primitive and totally agrarian society, devoid of education, arts and sciences. Assuredly, Micah’s abridgment should be understood as showing mankind will be both free and fully at peace during this time (though it may be plausible that the larger proportion of people could be involved in agriculture). Based on our knowledge of God, who is the Creator of the human mind, we may logically posit that the Kingdom of God shall employ high technology, in its most sophisticated expression, in every sphere of that society—including the areas of manufacturing, energy, transportation, communication, information processing, architecture, city planning, etc. Yet, this technology, under God’s direction, will not produce the debilitating by-products characteristic of today’s world pollution—energy will be clean and inexhaustible; waste products will be recycled; cities will be safe and sane; the ecology will be respected and the environment protected. Growth will not be wildly uncontrolled and encouraged for its own sake, but rather organized and ordered in accord with God’s master plan for the entire earth. Increasing levels of scientific knowledge,

technological application, and consumer consumption shall, no doubt, take place. Yet the fundamental spiritual values of life shall always predominate. Growth shall never eclipse the importance of individual human beings and human families. Indeed, more people will probably find their occupations in or near the home environment. Education at all levels and in all areas shall be a primary activity for all people. The Millennium shall be a time of the greatest advances in the field of human creativity in areas such as the arts and in every segment of science. The human mind shall be freed from the inhibitions of evil—no longer shall warfare and competition dominate the enormous developmental time, energy, and financial resources of countries and individuals. All efforts shall be devoted to the peaceful edification of society. The most artistic and dynamic works of human history—the most magnificent musical compositions and performances, the most beautiful paintings, the most expressive literature, etc.—shall be created under God’s laws. Although the administration of the Kingdom of God shall enforce a uniform law for all nations and peoples, and there are indications there shall be a universal language (Zeph. 3:9), this does not mean that cultural differences between people shall be eliminated. On the contrary, the diverse and unique personality, culture, music, art, dress, and habits of each nation shall be preserved and encouraged. God’s laws are universal in scope and shall be applied to, and shall strengthen, all peoples in all cultures in all environments. Travel and cultural exchange shall exist, with the primary intent—at least initially—of teaching all nations to follow the example of God’s people, Israel. To accomplish this, all nations shall send representatives to Israel to learn of God’s ways and laws (Isa.66:18–21, 23; Zech. 14:16–19), and Israel shall send teachers to all countries to help them apply these new concepts and put them into practice in their daily lives. All through the thousand-year rule of Christ, God shall continue to add people to His Kingdom. At the end of the Millennium all who have ever lived and died without

having a fair first chance for salvation shall be resurrected as physical beings to live in God's perfect society (Rev. 20:12). Those accepting salvation shall be inducted into God's spiritual Kingdom—His family—while those who reject God's gracious offer shall be destroyed in the lake of fire. Immediately thereafter a new heavens and new earth will appear (Rev. 21:1). Thus, we find God's Kingdom expanding in steps and growing dramatically from only two beings to an innumerable multitude through the process begun and made possible by and through Jesus Christ and His resurrection. Ultimately, following the thousand-year rule of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment, God shall replace the old earth with a "new heaven and new earth" (Rev. 21:1). This reformation of heaven and earth is part of the "restitution of all things" spoken of by Peter (Acts 3:21). The Father shall come to earth, ruling with Christ who shall then be second in command at His Father's side (1 Cor. 15:27–28), and God's entire family shall rule and share the entire universe. (Christ shall deliver the Kingdom to His Father, 1 Cor. 15:24.) "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from throne saying, Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them; He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away. And He who sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. Also He said, Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true. And He said to me, It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment. He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son" (Rev. 21:1–7). "And

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations" (Rev. 21:22–26). "Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall worship Him; they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 22:1–5). Revelation 21 and 22 are surely a complex amalgam of literal description, awesome imagery, and representative symbolism. Yet with all of this, the Bible only gives a hint of what God shall do after His plan for mankind has been completed and expanded so dramatically for His family and Kingdom. However, indications are that God shall in one way or another continue to enlarge His family forever. "For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder, and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end..." (Isa. 9:6–7). The scope of God's family shall literally be "all things"—that includes the whole universe. "Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet. For in that He put all in subjection under Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him. But now we see not yet all things put under Him" (Heb. 2:8). The incredible majesty of God's Kingdom—the fact that man is to become part

of God's family and co-rule and co-inherit the entire universe—is called a mystery in the New Testament. Jesus called it the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” in Matthew 13:11, and “the mystery of the kingdom of God” in Mark 4:11. This mystery includes several concepts “which [have been] kept secret since the world began” (Rom. 16:25) and “hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to His saints” (Col. 1:26)—for example, the opportunity for gentiles to participate in the Kingdom of God (Rom. 11:25) and become fellow heirs of the promise of Christ (Eph. 3:6); the uniting of all things in heaven and earth in Christ according to God's plan and purpose (Eph. 1:9); the relationship of Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:32). But the most important aspect of the mystery of the Kingdom of God is the fact that man can be a part of the family of God (1 Cor. 15:51ff; Heb. 2:10–13) and is ultimately destined to be jointheirs of the entire universe with Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:16–17). This mystery, “which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27), is ordained for “our glorification” (1 Cor. 2:7) and shall be fulfilled at the resurrection when the seventh trumpet sounds (Rev. 10:7). The Bible states that the purpose of human life—the ultimate goal for all human beings—is to eventually be born into the God family. This remarkable fact is surprisingly easy to prove. There is no difficult exegesis involved. In one sense, all that is required is a four-step process: a) The Creator of the Universe is the one who became Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:3, 10; Col. 1:16; Eph. 3:9; Heb. 1:2). b) Jesus Christ is equal with God (Jn. 5:18; Phil. 2:6). c) We are joint-heirs with Christ, and as a sure result, we shall all be glorified together with Him (Rom. 8:17). d) Whatever glory God the Father has given Christ will be shared with us (Jn. 17:11, 22). Also, a word-by-word reading—without interpretation—of Genesis 1:26 is all that's required. Here God succinctly gives the purpose of human life: Whereas animals reproduce after the animal kind, man reproduces after the God kind! Or, more properly phrased, human beings are the instruments through which God is

reproducing Himself. Human beings shall always retain their individually distinct minds—they shall become individual personalities in the Father's God family. Man shall do what God does. Man will feel, act, enjoy, and experience at precisely the same presently incomprehensible level of awareness at which God feels, acts, enjoys, and experiences. From the example of Jesus (the first man to be transformed into a spirit being, 1 Cor. 15:20), we see that man shall not lose his unique awareness or his individuality. Man will not be diffused into the “cosmic consciousness,” man will not be absorbed by the “infinite intelligence,” and man will not be swallowed up by “universal love.” As a matter of fact, just the opposite is true: The members of God's family in tomorrow's world shall be more distinct from one another than members of the human family are distinct from one another in today's world. All shall have their own individually specific memories, abilities, personality traits, jobs, responsibilities, preferences, and ideas. But there won't be any competition or conflict. Because the old culprit—self-centered human nature—will have long since been eliminated. Mankind has been promised to be made “equal with God.” What this simply means is individual human beings shall eventually become qualitatively equal with God because they will have been born into the God family, thereby considered actual “sons of God” (Rom. 8:14–15). Obviously this does not mean individual human beings shall eventually become quantitatively equal with either God the Father or Jesus Christ in position or authority—they will always remain supreme in their roles quantitatively. Being “equal with God” only means we shall be in the same God family as the Father and Christ are—it has nothing to do with equality of power, authority, intelligence, or role within the family. The Father will always remain the Father as Christ will always be our elder brother, Savior, and Creator—the Alpha and Omega (Rev. 22:13). In other words, those who shall be resurrected or changed “in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor.

15:52), shall share the exact same spiritual dimension and qualities of spirit life which today are only possessed by God the Father and Jesus Christ. For example, one of God's qualities is that He has inherent life—He generates eternal life intrinsically within Himself, because God is life. “For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself” (Jn. 5:26). Consequently, human beings born into God's family are promised eternal life (Jn. 3:16, 36; 4:14; 6:47; 7:38; 10:28; 17:2, etc.). Every individual person has been created to grow toward divine sonship (Rom. 8:1-15)—to become a literal resurrected Spirit-born son of God—a son who is in every way “like” his Father, yet a son who is always in thankful and gracious submission to his Creator Father and elder Brother Jesus' reigning role. But clearly, man shall never equal God the Creator, just as God the Creator (Jesus Christ) shall never equal God the Father's authority, or reigning position (Jn. 14:28). In similar manner the human family, defined by a heterosexual marriage, reflects this understanding very clearly. The father and mother will always retain those roles, but this does not dismiss the access of joint-benefits with the inherited security the sons and daughters receive by being part of the family—they are co-heirs of the family of God (Acts 26:18). These two original beings in the God family shall always remain in overall command. Their absolute authority will never be questioned—although they will delight in sharing progressively more of their responsibilities with their offspring as the God family continues to expand throughout space and time.

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## RESURRECTIONS

### DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Mankind's hope and the promise to the Christian is the resurrection from the dead. The Bible refers to (1) the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead and the pioneer of our salvation; (2) the resurrection of the saints—called the “first resurrection”—at the return of Christ when the true believers shall become spirit-composed members of God's family; (3) the resurrection back to physical life of all who have ever died without having understood God's way, for their first opportunity for salvation; (4) the resurrection of the incorrigibly wicked—those who have refused to repent and have rejected God's way—to be consumed in the lake of fire (called the “second death”).

*John 5:28–29; Acts 2:32; Romans 8:11; 1 Corinthians 15:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17; Revelation 20:4–6, 13–14.*

### DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The resurrection from the dead is the only real hope of man, whether he believes it or even knows about it. It gives him final, ultimate victory over death, which is the common enemy of every human being (1 Cor. 15:26). Paul referred to the “hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago” (Tit. 1:2). When Paul was brought before Felix, he admitted that “according to the way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers. Believing everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets, having a hope in God which these themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust” (Acts 24:14–15). The resurrection was the central theme of the apostles' message, which they preached powerfully. It was often controversial. Paul was called a “babbling” by

certain Greek philosophers “because he preached Jesus and the resurrection” (Acts 17:18); the resurrection from the dead was subjected to ridicule by some, and it intrigued others. “Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, “we will hear you again about this” (Acts 17:32). And hear again they shall; not only those ancient Greeks, but also every man, woman and child who ever drew breath on this earth. None who have ever died—in whatever place or at whatever time—are forgotten by God. Numerous scriptures make plain that a resurrection from the dead is an integral part of God’s plan for all mankind (Job 19:25–27; Jn. 5:21–29; 11:23–25, etc.). Scripture shows us an incredible special miracle where some people that died were brought back to life—resurrected—to live their physical lives for a while longer (1 Kings 17:22; Mk. 5:41; Jn. 11:44; Mt. 27:52; Acts 9:40). Jesus Christ, however, was the first to be resurrected from physical death to eternal life. He was in fact “designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). His resurrection is extremely important to the Christian because it proves the viability of God’s plan. We have “a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable” (1 Pet. 1:3); but “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14). Christ’s resurrection demonstrates positively that God can and shall resurrect a person who has God’s Spirit dwelling within him. It is the faith and belief that God shall resurrect the Christian as Christ was resurrected that encourages one to continue along the path of salvation. “For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His” (Rom. 6:5). Jesus Christ is called the “firstfruits” of the dead, because He was the first of many who shall follow Him in the resurrection, but “each in his own order.” First Corinthians 15:20–26 explains further: “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first

fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order: Christ the first fruits; then at His coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when He delivers the Kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” The Scriptures record resurrections for three different classifications of persons. The first is prophesied to occur at the return of Jesus Christ. A comparison of the pertinent verses indicates this first resurrection includes all saints that have lived and died from Adam’s time until Christ’s second coming, including those still alive when He comes (although technically, they shall be “changed” rather than resurrected—1 Cor. 15:51). This resurrection is from the nothingness of physical death to the incredible majesty of spiritual life as members of God’s family. “Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6). Another resurrection is prophesied for the multiple billions of human beings who have lived and died never having had a chance for salvation. This resurrection is from physical death to a second physical life during which a person shall be given God’s Spirit and the knowledge of salvation. The truth of God shall be opened to their understanding RESURRECTIONS Page 9 at this time and their lives shall be lived according to the biblical precepts. Ezekiel 37:1–14 paints a breath-taking picture of this resurrection to physical life, “Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves” (verse 12). Though only Israel is discussed, this is because it shall be the example—the nation that shall show how God’s plan works; thus, all nations and peoples of the earth are included in Ezekiel 37 by implication. This is confirmed in both John 5:25–29 and Revelation



20:11–12: “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it; from His presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done.” The Scriptures record one final resurrection classification. It is mentioned in various passages (e.g., Dan. 12:2–3; Jn. 5:21–29; etc.) but is explained most precisely in Revelation 20:14–15. Here John explains that the unrepentant—those who have had a chance for salvation but have adamantly rejected it—shall be resurrected to physical life and cast into the lake of fire where they shall be consumed. The death they suffer is called in Revelation 20 “the second death” (v. 14), which occurs only for those whose names are not found written in the book of life—that is, those who have not obtained salvation (v. 15). This final resurrection is essentially a mercy killing for those to whom eternal life in their state of rebellion would eventually mean extreme agony and misery. The first resurrection of saints to eternal life and the subsequent resurrection of the innumerable multitudes to physical life will be moments of unimaginable emotion when loved ones who thought they were separated forever—parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, friends and relatives—shall suddenly be reunited. For them it will be as though no time had passed, like awakening in the morning after a solid night’s sleep without dreams; it will be the next instant of their consciousness from the instant of their death no matter how they might have died or how long ago it might have been. Clearly it is expected that numerous questions about these awesome events will be raised. Paul asked and answered the most obvious one himself: “But some one will ask, How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” (1 Cor. 15:35). He then explains that as different animals have different types of bodies, so the body of the

resurrection is different from all others. It is celestial, imperishable, glorious, and spiritual. “So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and, the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:42–57).

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## PROPHECY

# DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Biblical prophecy is a historical and contemporary vehicle by which God demonstrates His power over the events of human history. The primary function of predictive prophecy is to show the sequence of events culminating in the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. The process by which this comes about is outlined in many passages of the Old and New Testaments.

*Isaiah 46:9–11; Matthew 12:36–37; 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 19:10; Isaiah 58:1*

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Central to the understanding of biblical prophecy is the recognition that God is Governor and Supreme Ruler, not only of the nations on earth, but the times and seasons as well. God portrays Himself as the real Author of human experience, the One who has formulated a master plan that culminates in the establishment of His government on earth and the vast majority of mankind qualifying to participate in it as Spirit-born sons of God. (Note: Some people are sensitive to the word “qualify,” noting that Scripture refers to salvation as a “gift”—Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8. It is important to note that “qualify” can have different meanings. Those who “qualify” are those who meet the conditions for salvation, and there is a huge difference between a condition and a cause. If you don’t have faith, or if you have it and then abandon it, you don’t qualify for the Kingdom, for you never had—or you abandoned—the necessary condition of faith. For example, a father may promise a new car to a son, if he gets his driver’s license. When he gets his license, he qualifies, and he gets the gift. The driver’s license is not the cause of the free gift; it was a condition to be met before he could receive the free gift.) One aspect of prophecy is it proves God’s existence. No man or other mortal could predict the future and then bring it to pass (Isa. 41:22ff). But one need not wait until the future to prove God’s

existence through prophecy. He can look to many Old Testament prophecies telling of Christ’s first coming—prophecies that have already been completely fulfilled in their letter and intent. Looking further, the numerous biblical prophecies pointing toward Jesus Christ’s return to earth as King of kings and Lord of lords are so powerful and so specific that they shall forever eliminate agnosticism and skepticism about God’s existence, once they have been fulfilled. It can be said that predictive prophecy is history written in advance. It is interesting to note that much of prophecy (perhaps most) is conditional, consisting of promises/warnings relative to the choices of the people to whom the prophecies pertain. Also, prophecy is God’s thinking and judgment on historic and contemporary situations and circumstances. It is not just about the future; it’s also about the present and how God wants us to behave. Amos provides a principle, “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). This assures us God has not left man totally in the dark about the general course of future world events. However, we need to remember, Amos’ statement was made within the context of a warning message to the covenant community (Israel). Through the prophet, God has warned them of what is coming upon them if they don’t turn back to Him. The “secret” (Amos 3:7) had already been revealed, and now Yahweh is about to act. The “lion has roared,” and only fools are “not afraid” (see v. 8). This text should not be seen as a universal promise that God will provide a warning every time something terrible, like a tsunami, earthquake, or terrorist attack, is about to occur. The term “prophecy” is most often used today to mean “prediction of the future.” The original prophets of ancient Israel had a role somewhat different from this. They did predict what would happen in the future, but this was usually in the context of the nation’s sins and the penalties their country would reap if the people did not turn from their evil ways. Sometimes fairly specific sequences of future events were laid down.

Normally, however, prophecy was rather general, outlining where the people went wrong and what would happen if they did not repent. At various times prophecies or oracles were pronounced against some of Israel's neighbors such as Assyria and Babylon. Prophecy and its spokesmen (prophets) have played a significant role from virtually the beginning of man's existence (Lk. 1:70; Acts 3:21). This role is not solely dedicated to declare futuristic developments but to also affect the behavior of individuals and nations in respect to divine laws and God's master plan. This relationship between prophecy and morality is clearly and consistently interwoven throughout the Old and New Testaments. As a matter of biblical fact, Jeremiah records this relationship as affecting the future of every nation on earth: "The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it" (Jer. 18:7–10). The vast spectrum of biblical prophecy is varied in form. Some prophecies were written as a result of dreams or visions, others by direct communication with heavenly beings. The prophetic words are occasionally clear and to the point; in other instances the statements are vague and ambiguous. There are several principles and keys (such as symbolism and duality) that govern the correct understanding of prophecy. These must be used consistently with the right methods and proper understanding of the background and context to arrive at the sought-for answers. A symbol is something used to represent something else. An example of symbolism in the Bible is the use of the word "mountain" to mean large nation (Mic. 4:1–4). The Bible generally interprets its own symbols—although many times in verses somewhat removed from the symbolic statement.

Duality is the term used when a prophecy has more than one fulfillment. An example of a duality would be Matthew 24:12–20, which describes both the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and events to occur just before the return of Jesus Christ. (The terms "type" and "antitype" can also be used to describe the original reality and the later understanding of biblical events, ceremonies, persons, times, etc.) The breadth and scope of prophecy has ranged from individuals to nations to the entire earth and beyond. In some cases it is evident that prophecies were announced and fulfilled and no longer have relevance in our day except as historical examples and lessons. But most major prophecies are yet to be fulfilled. And there is no doubt these major prophecies are focused on the return of Jesus Christ. It is the one major thread that binds both Old and New Testament prophecy together. In the same way that the prophetic Kingdom of God is the focal point of the gospel, so also is Christ Himself the focal point of all prophecy throughout the Bible in both testaments. The Old Testament is the story of Christ's genealogy, and the prophecies of His first and second comings. Indeed the whole thrust of the Old Testament—including the Levitical sacrificial system, which included many symbolic acts typifying Christ and His sacrifice to pay the penalty for humanity's sins. The New Testament is the story of His life and teachings and the detailed prophecies of His coming Kingdom. No prophecy is an end to itself. Any prophecy only has lasting importance in the final analysis, because it adds to our knowledge of Christ, His family, His way of life, His return, His coming Kingdom, and the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the setting up of God's Kingdom. If one forgets this simple truth, he may find himself wandering from obscure prophecy to obscure prophecy, restricted to learning about relatively unimportant technicalities while missing the overall thrust and importance of the basic prophecies leading up to Christ's second coming and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. It is paradoxical that so often the more

uncertain points of prophecy tend to receive the most attention. It sometimes seems these hard-to-decipher prophecies attract interest in direct proportion to how little about them is overtly stated in the Bible. There is nothing wrong with the study of obscure prophecies—indeed, it is quite understandable—so long as the relative importance is kept clear, and the prophecies about Jesus Christ are kept the clearest. God designed the human mind to enjoy the intellectual “high” which the probing of prophetic secrets affords. “It is the glory of God to conceal things: but the glory of kings to search things out” (Prov. 25:2). But there is a definite reason why God inspired the clear and obvious prophecies of the Bible to be clear and obvious. He wanted no one to miss the primary point of all prophecy: that Jesus Christ is to return and set up His Kingdom on earth. For one properly to understand prophecy, he must realize all future prophecies must relate to Christ and His Kingdom, and that for any specific prophecy to be properly understood, it must be seen against the context of Christ’s second coming. Most of the Bible’s prophecies focus on the “end time” (either primarily or dualistically), a time period of colossal, momentous worldwide problems culminating in total human destruction if Christ would not intervene to stop it. This present age is the best candidate for the “time of the end” that history has ever seen. No other previous time has paralleled the present capacity for man to eliminate all human life from the earth. The many possible methods of human self-annihilation now extant— whether quickly through nuclear, chemical, or biological warfare, or more slowly through famine, pollution, or disease—fit the biblical patterns and descriptions. Certainly, the key scripture of Matthew 24:22, “no human being would be saved” (RSV); “not a mortal could survive” (Berkeley); “not a soul would be saved alive” (Moffatt) could only be literally possible in an age like ours of thermonuclear overkill and global megaproblems. The commission to the Church of God is to preach the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all nations (Mt. 24:14). In

addition to the message of Christ’s death, forgiveness and salvation, the message Christ preached is both a warning and a witness—a warning about mankind’s plunge toward annihilation and a witness about what God will do to stop it. This message is a prophetic announcement of Christ’s second coming and the government He will set up at His return, and it is indeed the primary reason for the Church’s existence at this time. As stated, the focal point of all but a few specific historical prophecies is the “end time,” culminating in the return of Jesus Christ. In a number of instances the end time is specifically tied into historical prophecies which have already been fulfilled to a certain degree or type. For example, the long and intricate prophecy of Daniel 11 and 12 leaves known history at a certain point and clearly envisions the future resurrection and establishment of the Kingdom of God. Similarly, Matthew 24 describes the historical fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, yet these scriptures also project forward to the “consummation of the age.” Thus there is often a duality in prophecy. Events of past history will be paralleled by events immediately preceding the time of the end. Yet the general outline of end-time events is repeated from prophecy to prophecy with little deviation in basic structure. These may be summarized as follows: Immediately preceding the intervention of Jesus Christ is a time of unprecedented worldwide trouble. This is expressed in various ways by language which is both literal and metaphorical. However, a consistent theme is “a time such as never has been nor ever shall be,” a time when “no flesh shall be saved” from destruction if God did not put a stop to the calamitous course of human events. A specific sequence of tumultuous geopolitical developments shall focus on the Middle East, and Jerusalem shall be the central spot in and around which these major prophetic events shall take place. The major and minor prophetic books are replete with descriptions about, and admonitions to, Jerusalem in the end time. Great international contention is seen brewing over Jerusalem, which

shall move the city even further onto the center stage, as world events rush toward their climax. Indeed two of the key signs that Christ gave His disciples was that the fulfillment of all biblical prophecy and the subsequent establishment of God’s Kingdom would be at hand “when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies” (Lk. 21:20) and when you “shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place” (Mt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14). Furthermore, the two witnesses, who shall preach and prophesy against the entire earth, shall center their activities near the site of the temple in Jerusalem (Rev. 11:1–4). God said He would make Jerusalem “a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it” (Zech. 12:3). Though treacherous times are yet ahead for Jerusalem (e.g., Zech. 14:2), God states He shall go forth into battle against, and utterly destroy, all those nations that shall have gathered against Jerusalem (ch. 14:3, 12; 12:9), “and the LORD also shall save the tents of Judah first” (Zech. 12:7) when Jesus Christ returns. In these incredible (and forthcoming) days, God shall greatly strengthen the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Zech. 12:8); He shall pour out His spirit of grace and supplication on them (v. 10); He shall change the geography of the city when Christ’s feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4), and when living waters shall flow forth from Jerusalem nourishing the whole earth (Zech. 14:8). “In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech. 8:23). “Strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and pray before the LORD” (Zech. 8:22), “and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain” (Zech 8:3). (Much uncertainty remains, however, even about that which seems sure. There is difficulty determining the precise time frame of many verses. For example, Zephaniah 2:7 has been applied to both the modern state of Israel

in the Middle East and to the future millennial state: “And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: ... for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity.”) A pivotal set of verses regarding the crucial geopolitical sequence of events in the Middle East is Daniel 11:40ff. These verses describe a “king of the north,” who—in response to being “pushed at” by the “king of the south”—shall come against the king of the south “like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over.” Verse 41 continues: “He [the king of the north] shall enter also into the glorious land [holy land], and many countries shall be overthrown.” The specific delineation of nations—the Holy Land, Egypt, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Libya, Ethiopia—leads to fascinating speculations and captivating observations as one watches the current international geopolitical landscape develop. Daniel 2, together with Revelation 13 and 17, expands our understanding of this “king of the north.” This kingdom shall be a composite or union of “ten kings” (states or groups of states), which shall constitute a resurrection of the Roman Empire in an economic, political, military, and religious confederation that shall figure prominently in the various end-time prophetic geopolitical encounters. Clearly, the political union of Revelation 13 and 17 is described in terms which first century Mediterranean people would have recognized. Readers would have seen a scantily veiled representation of the Roman Empire with its military might, its political intrigues, and its rule over much of the known world. Indeed, the harlot of chapter 17 is called “the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth” (v. 18), a clear reference that many would have simply understood it as Rome itself. This illustrates that prophecy is often given in symbols that would have been directly meaningful to the present time and situation in which the prophecy was originally given. This makes the interpretation of prophecy, both easier and difficult at the same time.

The end-time “Babylon” or “Roman Empire” will certainly have characteristics in common with its ancient counterpart. On the other hand, it will also have differences which prevent an exact correspondence with the historical “type” or symbol. Thus, while one may look at the contemporary scene and make identifications that seem plausible, there is no guarantee that one’s speculations are exact. After all, many of the “prophecy charts,” time schemes, reconstructions, and the like of the past two millennia have been internally consistent and externally cogent. There was only one real flaw: they were wrong! So, the only real value of any prophetic presentation is ultimately a quite obvious test—will it, or will it not, actually occur in reality? Whatever the prophetic specifics in fact turn out to be, the outlines are assuredly clear: There will be swirling currents of international alliances and confederations vying for world power through economic, political, military, and religious control; and the focus of their attention shall be the Middle East in general and Jerusalem in particular. As the tangled complexities of world events hurtle toward their awesome conclusion, a comprehensive series of seals, woes, trumpet blasts, and plagues are unveiled with ever-increasing regularity, tension, and fury. (The book of Revelation describes these futuristic events in first century language.) At the climax of everything, with mankind literally on the brink of total self-annihilation, Jesus Christ returns to earth, accompanied by a spectacular series of heavenly signs (Joel 2:31; Mt. 24:29–31; Rev. 12–17). At His return, the dead in Christ shall be resurrected, and the elect still living shall be changed to spirit to rule with Christ on Earth from Jerusalem (Zech, 14:1–9). “For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up

together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:15–17). This shall be the most majestic moment in universal history, the focal point of the Bible, the time to which prophecy has primarily projected. “When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:54–57). Christ and the saints will be opposed initially by a system called “Babylon,” and leaders referred to as “the Beast” and the “antichrist.” These shall all have characteristics of persons and institutions of past history, even though they shall have a unique existence at the end time. They shall be destroyed and Satan, who has incited the rebellion against Christ, shall be cast into a place of spiritual restraint (Rev. 20:1–3). Then begins the millennial rule of Christ and the saints over the earth. After some continuing confrontations and battles (described in Ezek. 38 and 39), God’s Kingdom shall be set up over all peoples; and Jesus Christ shall teach them God’s laws, the way of happiness and eventually of eternal salvation. This 1,000-year period shall be followed by the Great White Throne Judgment and finally the new heaven and new earth, both of which are descriptively hazy, as the Bible does not reveal much information about either. Whenever God has chosen to intervene in human history, important circumstances of major consequence were always involved: the course of nations, the role of governments, the fate of kings, and the destinies of peoples. God’s direct interaction with, and control over, the kings and governments of Babylon and Persia (Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus) are two prominent Old Testament examples that illustrate His involvement with the nations and the world rulers at that time. Prophecies against Egypt and Assyria are also additional other examples. We know at least one

biblical prophecy that “failed,” not because God erred, but because the people fully responded en masse to God’s warning and unitedly repented. Jonah was sent to Nineveh to predict its fall in forty days. This was a prophecy from God; it did not take place. This example illustrates the fact that much specific prophecy is contingent upon the actions of the parties involved (Ezek. 33:7–16). The implications for today are obvious; the responsibilities of God’s “watchmen” are enormous. Bible prophecy has an ongoing critical relevance to the course of modern nations and the destinies of contemporary peoples. The identity of certain modern nations in terms of their ancient names is important for understanding current and future events. Some nations such as Egypt retain their exact original names. Other names, though somewhat changed, are easily traceable; for example, Judah (or the House of Judah) represents the Jewish people in the modern state of Israel, while Moab and Ammon represent the Arab peoples in modern Jordan today. The modern identification of the “House of Israel” as the United States and British Commonwealth is an important part of the Church’s prophetic understanding. While the United States is understood to be specifically represented as “Manasseh” and the British Commonwealth as “Ephraim,” the identity of the remainder of the original Israelite tribes is uncertain (though some evaluations have been made, such as equating France with Reuben.) The identification of the United States and British Commonwealth as the House of Israel leads to serious and momentous prophetic implications for the future. The time of the end is also called “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), because the modern descendants of the House of Israel shall be taken captive by “strangers” and severely oppressed. It will take the return of Jesus Christ to rescue and free the modern descendants of the patriarch Jacob from national humiliation and restore them to the knowledge of God. This event shall be of such enormous magnitude that Israel’s original exodus from Egypt shall be forgotten by comparison (Jer. 16:14–15, 23:7–8, Is.

11:16; 27:12–13). God has given us a general overview of the Church itself in prophecy, with its main commission dedicated to preparing the way for Christ’s return by preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world as a witness (Mt. 24:14). The admonition to the “watchman” of Ezekiel 33 applies as well: “...if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes, and takes any one of them; that man is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand” (Ezek. 33:6). Although enormous numbers of incredibly detailed prophetic schemes have been deduced from the Bible, the success record of correctly predicting future events and dates has been rather meager. Hindsight has always been more successful than foresight in determining the reality of prophecy. Certainly the injunction to “watch at all times” (Lk. 21:36) must be heeded, but the Bible does not give any major examples of people acquiring specific predictive knowledge of the future from the written prophecies alone. Yet, as mankind’s history approaches “the time of the end,” a generation when “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased,” prophecy in general and the book of Daniel in particular shall become progressively more understandable (Dan. 12:4). Shall there come a time when God will directly inspire some of His servants to literally prophesy about imminent world events? Biblical indications and precedents would suggest so. Joel 2:28—“I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions”— was applied by Peter on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. But the context of Joel 2 is clearly just “before the great and terrible day of the LORD” (v. 30–31), indicating that the primary fulfillment of Joel 2:28 is yet ahead. What is abundantly clear from the Bible is this absolute fact: Jesus Christ will return to earth and set up a world-ruling government of God during a time of great human turmoil and disaster. Also emphasized in the

Bible is the sequence of events immediately surrounding Christ's return (primarily before, but after as well), not the long detailed history of centuries between New Testament times and the end time. The Bible does not encourage speculating or predicting specific dates when a prophecy is to be fulfilled and then planning one's life around what is forecasted to happen on or by such a date. To the contrary, we are told, "But of that day and hour no one knows" (Mt. 24:36). The "faithful and wise servant" will be aggressively and persistently doing God's work at the return of Christ, and will not have shrunk back from life's responsibilities because of his (real or imagined) interpretations of prophecy (Mt. 24:36ff). Though prophecy has always been intriguing and exciting to those seeking to know the future, Paul's strong admonition is that "if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2). Love, then, is the essential characteristic of the Christian—it is the clearest stamp of God's Spirit in action. Interestingly enough, Paul continues his contrast of love and prophecy in this chapter. "Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away (fail, KJV)...For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away" (1 Cor. 13:8–10). The study of prophecy can be an interesting and rewarding experience. It is indeed placed in Scripture to be investigated, analyzed, and appreciated in a Christian's relationship to God. However, it is still unfolding and we must be careful to let events in the real world guide our understanding of the times and seasons, rather than leaping ahead with speculations not grounded on actual events supported by Scripture. As we draw nearer to the climax of mankind's civilization, we will see the convergence of major prophetic developments. No doubt they shall take on sharper focus and point us more precisely to the surest and most important prophecy of all—the return of Jesus Christ.

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## GOSPEL

### DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The gospel is the message preached by Christ and by His Church about God's coming Kingdom, the restoration of His government on earth, and how mankind can enter that Kingdom and government. It includes the message of what Jesus has done, is doing, and shall do—and ultimately is the message of the entire Old and New Testaments. The primary purpose and commission of the Church is to proclaim this gospel to the entire world as a witness to all nations, and to baptize and teach those who respond.

*Matthew 3:2; 24:14; 28:19–20; Mark 1:15; Luke 24:47*

### DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The word "gospel" simply means "good news." The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news that He is coming again to establish His Kingdom on this earth in place of man's governments, and the good news of how we can become part of that government as sons of God. Hence, the gospel is called "the gospel of the Kingdom of God" (Mk. 1:14), and it is this gospel that Christ came preaching (same verse). As Jesus went on to say, repentance and belief in the gospel go hand in hand (Mk. 1:15). In its broadest sense, the gospel includes the whole story of the Bible—the whole panorama of what God is doing with mankind, especially God's plan of salvation and forgiveness of sins. The true gospel is a message of hope given to a world in danger of destroying itself. Christ's return is the essential component of the biblical message. The reason for His return is the establishment of His Father's Kingdom on earth, putting an end to man's



unhappy and unsuccessful rule. Hence, Christ's return and coming Kingdom is the subject of the message that He commissioned His disciples and Church to preach to all nations until His return. In John 18:33 Pilate asked Christ, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth." That is the true gospel. Christ, destined to rule this earth as the King of God's Kingdom, was to preach this message—the good news to the world. He came to bear witness to the truth—to tell the world that God's Kingdom is going to rule this earth whether mankind believes it or not. This world-ruling Kingdom is alternately referred to as the Kingdom of God (Luke 19:11), the Kingdom of heaven (Mt. 6:10), and the Kingdom of Christ (Rev. 11:15). Its full eschatological realization is described as the regeneration (Mt. 19:28), the times of refreshing (Acts 3:19), and the world to come (Heb. 2:5). The disciples of Christ had no doubts about the message Christ was preaching. They understood He was coming again to put an end to this present evil age and to replace it with the glorious Kingdom of God that Daniel described (Dan. 2:7, 7:17–18, 26–27). The fact that the apostles asked Christ when His Kingdom would be set up proves they knew about that coming Kingdom and had great expectation of it. Christ's answer to their question was His Kingdom would not be set up until the gospel of that Kingdom should be preached to all the world as a witness (Mt. 24:14). The message of the coming Kingdom of God includes, as an integral part, the preaching of spiritual salvation for all, through Jesus Christ—that He died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:1–3) and that He was resurrected (v. 14). The only person who has already been saved is Jesus Christ, who was resurrected from the dead and now sits at the right hand of God the Father. He is the pioneer of our salvation, the one who has gone on ahead and shown the way (Heb. 2:10). When He returns, at the end of this age, those who have died in Christ in previous years shall be raised from the dead and given eternal life to rule

with Him (Jn. 5:24–29). Previous to His return, salvation will have been accepted by a minority of people; after His return, it shall be made available to all. Thus, the true gospel is God's message to man through Christ about His coming Kingdom and how humans may enter it. It includes the ultimate purpose of human life and the plan devised by God to bring it about. This is the true destiny of man—to GOSPEL JUDGMENT Page 17 become members of God's family. This potential of being born of God as His children in His family is universally applicable to all mankind—it is the potential of men and women, Jews and Gentiles, all races and peoples, for we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). This gospel was understood in part by the Old Testament patriarchs and the prophets. It has been preached "since the world began" (Lk. 1:70). Hebrews 11 states that these men died in faith—not yet having received the "promises" (i.e., of the Kingdom of God and eternal life, v. 13)—"but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" waiting for God's Kingdom. Those who acknowledge the temporary physical existence of this life "declare plainly that they seek a country" (i.e., the goal of God's Kingdom, v. 14). Likewise, many Old Testament verses show plainly that those with whom God was dealing then knew of His coming Kingdom. "For unto us a child is born, and unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulders:....of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his Kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and justice from henceforth and even forever" (Isa. 9:6–7). Only God's government and Kingdom could be eternal—the Kingdom referred to in these verses (see also Dan. 2; Mic. 4; Zech. 14; etc.). The gospel of the Kingdom of God can be traced from the patriarchs of Old Testament prophets, through the ministry of John the Baptist, and finally to Jesus Christ who greatly expanded our understanding of His coming Kingdom and showed

how men might enter it as members of the God family. Christ commissioned the disciples to preach it in all its important aspects. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:19–20). “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Mt. 24:14). The early disciples followed Christ’s command to preach this gospel of the Kingdom as a witness to all nations. The Church of God also follows this command and views as the primary reason for its existence the commission to preach the gospel of the Kingdom to all nations in accordance with Jesus Christ’s instructions. The Church today strives to continue fulfilling that commission with everincreasing effectiveness, following in the tradition of Elijah the prophet and John the Baptist (Mal. 4:5–6), by preparing the way for Christ’s return through the announcement of that gospel message.

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## GOSPEL

### DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

The time of one’s judgment is the time of his opportunity for salvation, extending from one’s calling by God until his death (or the resurrection). During this judgment period a person’s mind is opened to understand God’s way, and his actions and attitudes are being evaluated by God in the light of His way of life and His law. All human beings since Adam and Eve shall have a fair opportunity for salvation either now (for the Church), or at the time of the second resurrection, in the Great White Throne

Judgment. Those who shall qualify for God’s Kingdom—perhaps the overwhelming majority—shall inherit eternal life, and those who deliberately reject God’s way shall be consumed in the lake of fire.

*Matthew 13:49–50; 25:34; 1 Peter 4:17; Revelation 20:15; 21:8*

### DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

One of the most awesome truths of God is that all of mankind, from the time Adam and Eve were created until now, shall have a fair opportunity for salvation—the attainment of eternal life in the family of God. No human being is doomed forever simply because they have never heard of Christ’s name or never really understood God’s purpose and plan. God makes it plain that He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). He intends to give everyone a chance to know and understand His truth and to have the opportunity to be with Him in His glorious Kingdom (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4). Combined with this thrilling truth about all men receiving an opportunity for salvation is the fact that all men will not receive this opportunity at the same time. The time during which individuals receive their chance of salvation is the time of their judgment. The term “judgment,” as used in this context, is not restricted to passing sentence. Rather, it implies a process, a period of time during which a person’s mind is opened to understand God’s plan, and his actions are now under daily scrutiny by God in the light of His law. God is intimately concerned with His children and works in their lives to produce the ultimate results. The parable of the tares of the field shows that Christians start out as seeds and must grow until the harvest (Mt. 13:36–43). Generally, this judgment process for most people covers a period of many years of one’s life. But judgment involves more than just making a “yes” or “no” decision—more than the simple determination of whether a person shall be

granted salvation—for, indeed, the overwhelming majority shall make it. Judgment also involves the reward that God shall give to each person who qualifies. There are different positions and responsibilities in God’s family. As Jesus explained in the parable of the pounds (Lk. 19:12–27), the servants who used their pounds profitably were given positions of rulership, but the level or degree of their position was directly proportional to how much they accomplished. The parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14–30) shows that God rewards each person according to what he accomplished (his works) in relationship to what he had to start with. The servant who started with two talents and made two received the same reward as the servant who started with five and made five. Revelation 20 provides God’s revelation to mankind about two great judgment periods, each of which specifically addresses a different classification of persons. The first period of judgment began at the creation of man and continues until the return of Jesus Christ. During this period, the vast majority of people, due to deception and a widespread lack of knowledge of the true gospel, have not responded to God’s call. Only a relatively small group—“the elect” (Rom. 8:28ff)—have responded in genuine faith and been converted. These “elect” have had their minds opened to understand God’s truth and are given God’s Holy Spirit during this present age. For these persons—who compose the Church, or “house of God”—the period of judgment is now. “For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God” (1 Pet. 4:17). (The “elect” includes Old Testament people of faith, as well.) Those who respond to God’s call now—by virtue of God’s mercy—are acting on an inner desire to serve God (Ps 42:2, Jn. 7:37). Paul provides a scriptural reason for these Christians to not be boastful when he says, “For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (1 Cor. 4:7). The masses have not responded to God’s call now because of Satan’s deception and selfish human nature—and

God wants man to learn by experience that his ways apart from God are the ways of death (Prov. 14:12). Those who do respond to God’s call now are called for the express purpose of preaching the gospel to the world as a witness (Mt. 24:14; 28:19–20) and to prepare for rulership in God’s millennial Kingdom (Rev.5:10). All those qualified for God’s Kingdom—from Adam and Eve to the return of Christ—shall be resurrected (or “changed” from flesh to spirit) at Christ’s second coming. The end of this first judgment period is thus completed at the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5–6). During His thousand-year reign, Christ and the saints shall re-establish God’s government on earth (Mic. 4:1–4) and reconstruct society so that in every way it conforms to God’s holy laws. God shall also pour out His Spirit upon all those who will be alive during this time, and open their minds to understand the gospel, giving them a chance for salvation. Isaiah describes this time: “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left” (Isa. 30:21). This describes how the formerly rebellious people will readily receive God’s Word. The “word” from their teachers and leaders will always be with them, guiding them along the right path. After the thousand-year period, there is the “Great White Throne” judgment—also described in the Bible as the second resurrection (Rev. 20:5–6). This spectacular event epitomizes the time when all who ever lived and died without having had a chance for salvation—never having heard about Jesus Christ and the plan of God, or never had their eyes opened to actually understand the true gospel—shall be resurrected from the dead to physical life (Rev. 20:11ff). This time their minds shall be opened to a much fuller and clearer understanding of God’s laws and His truth. “Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves...And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done it, says the LORD” (Ezek. 37:12–14). This

judgment period is the largest because it includes the innumerable multitudes of all humanity who have lived and died in ignorance of God's way. Although God wants everyone to accept the knowledge of His truth and earnestly desires that all obtain salvation, it is nevertheless true that some shall totally reject God and lose out on eternal life. Those who have adamantly rejected this truth—those who have committed the unpardonable sin by not asking God to pardon their sins— shall be thrown into the lake of fire (Heb. 6:4–8; 10:26–31; Rev. 20:14). These individuals are those who would never repent of their sins and shall therefore be put out of their misery by a merciful God. It would be a cruel punishment for God to allow a rebellious person to live forever under His government when that individual has permanently rejected God's government in his life and by his actions and attitudes. God's fairness, justice, concern, and love for mankind is exemplified by these judgment periods outlined above. His plan for salvation includes ample opportunity for all those who have ever lived and died to live a full physical life under God's laws, to qualify for entry into His Kingdom, and, ultimately, to gain eternal life as full Spiritborn members of His divine family.

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