

Armor of God

January/March 2001

Can Science Make
Us Immortal?

Can Science Make Us Immortal? • Part II: Immortality—God's Gift to the Saints
You Can't Lose Out on Salvation...or Can You? • The Rest of the Story

Greetings from The Church of God International Philippines Ministry!

We thank you for the continued support you have wholeheartedly extended for the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God! May God bless you in all your efforts and shower you with good health.

In fulfilling the commission Christ gave the church, the Philippine Ministry, through the local churches, are conducting regular monthly Bible Studies to preach the wonderful Gospel of the Kingdom of God and share the true faith once and for all delivered to the saints.

You are cordially invited to attend the Free Bible Study series. Join us in an informative video presentation followed by interactive open forum style discussion of the Bible. The Bible Study series are held every first Sabbath (Saturday) of the month starting March 2001, 2:00-5:00 PM, at the following locations nearest you.

Metro Manila

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32-B Rizal St., La Paz, Iloilo City
Tel. No. 337-5882

The schedules and the subjects of the Bible Study Sessions are as follows:

March 03, 2001, Saturday

What is The Destiny of Man?

Have you ever wondered what life is all about? Who are we?

Where did we come from? What are we doing here? Where are we going?

April 07, 2001, Saturday

When was the Resurrection of Jesus?

Jesus said his proof as the Messiah is to be "three days and three nights" in the heart of the earth, a full 72 hours, either that or He is not the Messiah! The traditional belief that Jesus died Friday sunset and rose Sunday morning is only 36 hours. Did Jesus make a mistake or is our long-cherished Church tradition WRONG?

May 05, 2001, Saturday

Who is The Real Jesus?

How well do you know Jesus? When was He really born? Did He exist before He became a human being? What did He look like?

Did He have real-blood brothers and sisters? Where is He today?

Was He Michael the Archangel as some believe?

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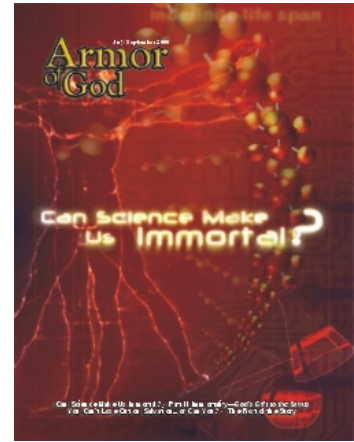


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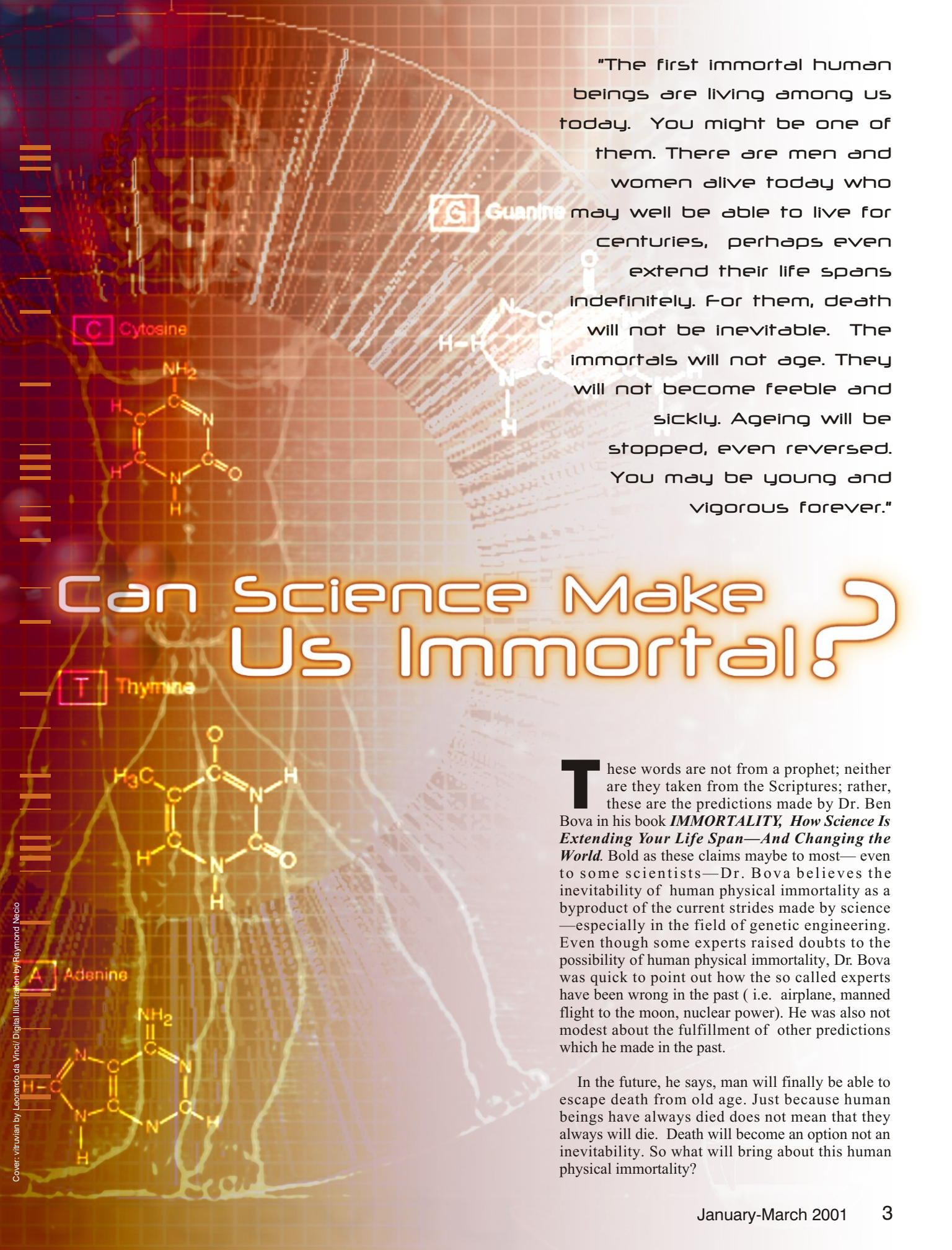
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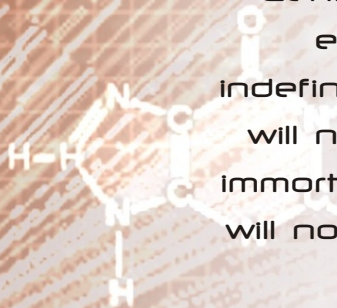
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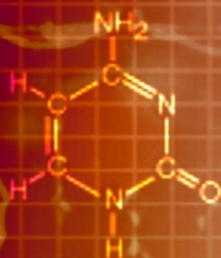
"The first immortal human beings are living among us today. You might be one of them. There are men and women alive today who may well be able to live for centuries, perhaps even extend their life spans indefinitely. For them, death will not be inevitable. The immortals will not age. They will not become feeble and sickly. Ageing will be stopped, even reversed. You may be young and vigorous forever."



Guanine



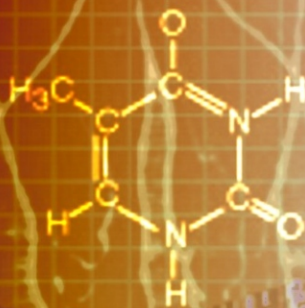
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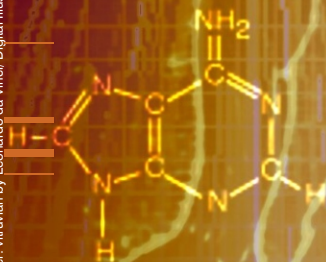
Can Science Make Us Immortal?



Thymine



Adenine



These words are not from a prophet; neither are they taken from the Scriptures; rather, these are the predictions made by Dr. Ben Bova in his book *IMMORTALITY, How Science Is Extending Your Life Span—And Changing the World*. Bold as these claims maybe to most— even to some scientists—Dr. Bova believes the inevitability of human physical immortality as a byproduct of the current strides made by science—especially in the field of genetic engineering. Even though some experts raised doubts to the possibility of human physical immortality, Dr. Bova was quick to point out how the so called experts have been wrong in the past (i.e. airplane, manned flight to the moon, nuclear power). He was also not modest about the fulfillment of other predictions which he made in the past.

In the future, he says, man will finally be able to escape death from old age. Just because human beings have always died does not mean that they always will die. Death will become an option not an inevitability. So what will bring about this human physical immortality?



One strand of DNA holds the information that codes for various genes; this strand is often called the template strand or antisense strand (containing anticodons). The other, and complementary, strand is called the coding strand or sense strand (containing codons).

In the future, man will finally be able to escape death from old age...death will become an option rather than an inevitability...

Several avenues toward immortality have been mentioned: telomerase, MORF4 (Mortality Factor from human chromosome number 4), human growth hormone (hGH), organ regeneration, cryonics and nanomachines.

Let's take a look at some of them:

Telomerase As we age, our cell reproduction progressively declines. That is why we look the way we do when we grow old. Researchers, however, found that each time our cells divide, the telomeres which cap the ends of our chromosomes, get shorter. After about 50 divisions (depending on what type of cell), the telomeres become too short to protect the chromosome. Consequently, the cell is no longer able to reproduce and eventually dies.

This led Michael Fossel, professor of clinical medicine at the Michigan State University to conclude that "telomeres [are] the clocks of ageing."

So is there a way to stop this clock or even reverse it? Some researchers believe so. By expressing the enzyme telomerase in human culture cells, the cells were able to rebuild telomeres; thereby allowing cells to exceed their Hayflick limit (number of times a cell can divide).

MORF4 Researchers at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, introduced the MORF4 gene to

cancerous cells and found that the tumor stopped growing and becomes senescent. When a mutated form of MORF4 was added to normal human cells, it enabled the cells to exceed their Hayflick limit.

hGH also known as somatotropin, showed evidence of its direct relationship to ageing. Studies of male volunteers in their 60s and 70s by Dr. Daniel Rudman of the Medical College of Wisconsin has shown that those who received the hGH injections not only stopped ageing in some ways their ageing was reversed.

Regeneration Imagine having the ability to lose an arm and grow it back. Some animals already have this capability and humans, it seems, are not too far behind. And some are more than willing to take this a step further. They see a future where science can bring a person back to life by taking his DNA sample and literally build him from scratch.

Nanomachines Ray Kurzweil, author of *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, talked about the near future where computers will have become more powerful than the human brain. You can have your brain scanned and stored as a 'mind file'. By having a 'virtual' copy of yourself in a hard drive, you can continue to exist even if your organic self dies. Thereby achieving immortality.

Among all these possibilities, the one which received a lot of media attention is the enzyme telomerase. Some believe that the legendary quest for the 'fountain of youth' as made famous by Ponce de Leon has come to an end. And it did not come in the form of a hidden spring located deep in a forest somewhere. It came in a form of an enzyme that can be found in our own DNA.

Societal implications

Will science be able to extend human life indefinitely? Can man finally gain eternal life through his own efforts? Some feel that it is only a matter of time; while others answer with a resounding no. And this is not the first time scientific efforts like these have met strong opposition. Political and religious figures have expressed their fears on the consequences this will have on society. Already there are questions posed on the social, ethical, and religious issues which may arise because of these developments.

The fact that many, out of fear, have lobbied against the furtherance of this scientific endeavor is an indirect confirmation of the possibility of extending human life considerably—maybe even indefinitely. Even the Scriptures tell us that "nothing they [man] plan to do will be impossible for them" (Genesis 11:6). And a few individuals like Dr. Ben Bova feel that the point wherein science will be able to achieve such a feat is inevitably near.

There is absolutely no question as to whether people need to live forever or not. Nobody wants to die. It is man's nature to



1. Senescence
2. Hayflick limit

For man to be truly immortal he must not only survive time and resist disease, but he must also be indestructible.

want to continue to exist; to live a long, healthy, and happy life. Isn't existence more basic than food, shelter, and clothing? After all, doesn't the Scripture say, "is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" (Matthew 6:25)

So should people start looking to science for eternal life? As Marvin Cetron, in his book *Cheating Death* co-written with Owen Davies, puts it, "will religion still have something to offer people whose salvation is as near as the local pharmacy?"

Truly Immortal

Will religion become a relic from the past; now that science has looked into the very core of what religion is offering? Will the future be characterized by people going to the pharmacy rather than their local congregations? Will eternal life become just another commodity item?

Extending life span indefinitely is one thing; while making one truly immortal is another. Undoubtedly, man may be able to discover a way to extend human life considerably. But can man through science give us true eternal life?

For man to be truly immortal he must not only survive time and resist disease, but he must also be indestructible. Man can still die from accidents, war, famine, pestilence, and disease. To this, science can see no answer. Nowhere in the foreseeable future. And probably never.

For as long as man remains physical he will never be truly immortal. Man, through his own efforts, will never escape death. Because death came as a result of man's sin (Romans 5:12). Man should tremble because there is "One who can destroy both soul and body" (Matthew 10:28). Moreover, the Scriptures speak of a time when the heavens, the earth, and everything in it—will be destroyed by fire: "that day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in heat" (2 Peter 3:12). There is no capsule available in the local pharmacy which can save man from that.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with wanting to live long. In fact, it is good for man to desire such a thing. But he has to know where to look. He has to realize what are in his powers to do and what are not. The One True God who is in heaven offers true eternal life. A life not subject to hunger, pain, ageing, and death.

Immortality is not only an issue of time, but also an issue of composition. Man must change in substance, from flesh—which is perishable—to spirit—which is imperishable, to gain eternal life. "For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality." (1 Corinthians 15:53)

True immortality can only come from God—through his Son Jesus; and "to those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life." (Romans 2:7)

AG

This loss of division potential and the simultaneous change in morphology was termed cellular/replicative senescence. Hayflick did a number of experiments to demonstrate that the cell senescence model was not an artifact of putting cells in culture.

Only the Body Dies?

An argument often used to distort the biblical truth about man is the view that only the body dies at the withdrawal of man's breath; the soul cannot. Yet Ezekiel 18:4 explicitly states that "the soul that sins shall die." Those same words are repeated in verse 20.

The Messianic text in Isaiah 53 shows that Jesus as a human being went the way of all flesh—He died. And when He died it was not just the body which died but also His soul. Notice Isaiah 53:12, which predicted that the Messiah would pour out "his soul to death."

See also Psalm 89:48: "What man can live and never see death? Who can

Nor is there any evidence that there is some special place called "paradise" where Christians stay in transit until the resurrection when they join Christ in heaven.

The uniform testimony of Scripture is that the dead remain in their graves until the time of the resurrection.

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

Daniel 12:2 says, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth

Now if the dead go immediately to be with the Lord at death, how can they only rise at the last trumpet?

The Scriptures show that at the resurrection it is the entire person who is raised, not merely his body. "The dead in Christ" are the persons who die in Christ, not just their bodies.

Look at Job 14:12 to see unequivocally that it is the person himself, not just a part of him, who rises when Christ returns: "So man [*his entire being*] lies down and rises not again; till the heavens are no more he will not awake; or be roused out of his sleep."

This takes us to the next point: that the Bible consistently refers to death as a

IMMORTALITY

God's Gift to the Saints

deliver his soul from the power of Sheol [*the grave—NKJV*]?"

Matthew 10:28 is abundantly clear: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body...." The soul can be destroyed! Why do we refuse to believe the plain statements of Scripture?

Resurrection or Immortal Soul?

The title of the book of one noted theologian, Oscar Cullman, says it all: *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?* It is an either-or issue. You cannot have both.

What is the purpose of the resurrection if the saints are already in heaven with Christ and the wicked in hell?

shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." I Corinthians 15:52 shows that it is at the resurrection that the saved will gain immortality, and before then the dead are asleep in their graves. "For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable... 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?"

I Thessalonians 4:15 refers to the dead as being "asleep." The text goes on to say that when the Lord returns "the dead in Christ will rise first" (verse 16).

sleep.

The Sleep of the Dead

If death does not indicate unconsciousness why would the analogy of sleep be meaningful? The Psalmist refers to the "sleep of death" (Psalm 13:3). Psalm 115:17 says, "The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any that go down into silence." Matthew 27:52 states that "the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised." In Acts 7:60 we read of Stephen who "fell asleep." Second Peter 3:4 speaks of those who ask, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued..."

Other equally clear texts show unmistakably that the dead are

unconscious. Psalm 146:4 says, “When his [man’s] breath departs he returns to his earth; on that very day his plans [“thoughts”—KJV] perish.” The Psalmist asks, “Dost thou work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise up to praise thee? ...Are thy wonders known in the darkness, or thy saving help in the land of forgetfulness?” (Psalm 88:10,12).

The idea that the saints are having a great time praising the Lord and playing on harps finds no support in the Sacred Scriptures! The dead are asleep; they are in silence, in the land of forgetfulness! Psalm 6:5 says pointedly, “For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol [the grave] who can give thee praise?”

soul. In Genesis 2:7 we read, significantly, that “God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being [or soul—KJV].” Notice that man was not given a soul; God did not breathe a soul within man. Man became a living soul, a living being. *Man IS the living soul.*

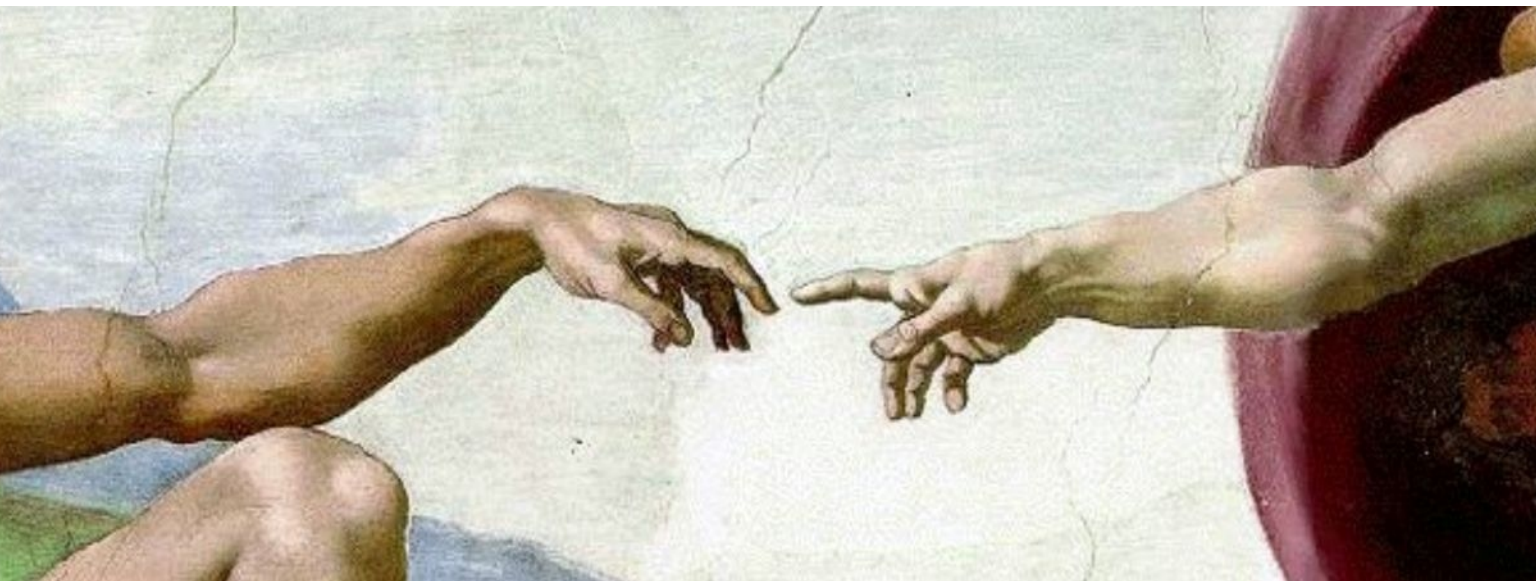
The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*, which is often translated “person,” meaning one’s entire being, not some immaterial part of him. The Hebrews had a holistic conception of human beings.

In Genesis 12:5 we read of Abraham’s gathering all the “persons” (*nephesh*, rendered “souls” in the KJV)

translated from the Hebrew *nephesh*, which means soul. If they did, it would be patently clear that the notion that the soul cannot die is a flagrant error.

Numbers 31:19, for example, says, “Encamp outside the camp seven days; whoever of you has killed any person [*nephesh*]....” See also Numbers 35:15, 30; Joshua 20:3, 9; Genesis 37:21; Deuteronomy 19:6, 11; and Jeremiah 40:14, 15 to see that souls (persons) die.

We find in the very first revelation about man’s creation that man did not possess a soul but rather *was* a soul. So where did we get the concept of an immaterial soul that constitutes the real person and that could have an independent existence from the body?



Immortality to Be Sought

Immortality is set forth in Scripture as something to be sought and attained in the future. Romans 2:6,7 says that God “will render to every man according to his works; to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life.”

Immortality is a gift of God through Christ. It is not possessed inherently by humans. Only the saved will be granted immortality. For proof see 2 Timothy 1:10, which states that Jesus Christ “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

What Is a Soul?

Let’s go to the very first book of the Bible to see God’s revelation of what man really is and what constitutes the

they had gotten in Haran. Genesis 46:27 says that seventy “persons” (*nephesh*) went into Egypt.

Leviticus 7:20 says that the “person” (*nephesh*) who touches any unclean thing shall be cut off. The English translations use “soul” and “person” interchangeably in a number of texts. (The King James Version regularly uses “soul” while the Revised Standard Version uses “person”; it has the same meaning and comes from the same Hebrew, *nephesh*.) Leviticus 23:30 says, “And whoever does any work on this same day, that person [soul] I will destroy from among his people.”

The problem is that many persons reading English translations might not realize that a number of references to a “person” (or “persons”) dying are

As Clark Pinnock and other scholars have pointed out, this view in Christian theology has come from Platonic thought.

What Is the Spirit in Man?

Saying that man has no immaterial soul within is not to say that man is not distinguished from the animal kingdom. Man is made in the image of God; the animals and plants are not. Man has intelligence and reasoning ability and shares a number of characteristics with his Maker. Nothing must be done to take away from man’s uniqueness in the created order. However, we need not build myths to sustain our uniqueness and supremacy in the earthly created order.

Some believe that the spirit in man,

which goes back to God upon death of the body, can enable man to have conscious existence at that time.

Ecclesiastes 12:7 says that “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit [*ruach*] returns to God who gave it.”

The spirit is the life force which God breathed into man which made him a living soul. It is the life principle, the life energy, without which human life is not possible. As Job says, “If he [God] should take back his spirit [*ruach*] to himself, and gather to himself his breath [*neshamah*], all flesh would perish together, and man would return to the dust” (Job 34:14,15). The spirit animates human life. It has no separate existence apart from the body.

The breath of life which God breathed into man is equated with the spirit in man. Notice the Hebrew parallelism in Job 27:3: “[A]s long as my breath is in me, and the spirit of God in my nostrils; my lips will not speak falsehood.” Notice this other parallelism (where the same thought is expressed in two ways for emphasis) in Job 33:4:

The spirit is the life force which God breathed into man which made him a living soul. It is the life principle, the life energy, without which human life is not possible.

“The spirit [*ruach*] of God has made me, and the breath [*neshamah*] of the Almighty gives me life.”

Yet another example of this parallelism is found in Isaiah 42:5: “Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out...who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it.” The Scriptures are, indeed, abundantly clear that the breath of life is equated with the spirit in man.

Those who use Ecclesiastes 12:7, which says that “the spirit returns to God who gave it,” to prove that the spirit is equated with the immortal soul have a very uncomfortable dilemma: They are forced to teach that everyone who dies, not just the saved, goes to heaven irrespective of whether he had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ!

No, the spirit in man is the breath of life which was given to man. As Job

34:14,15 says, “If [God] he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; All flesh shall perish”—cease from existence. (KJV)

Objection after objection crumbles as we look at the scriptural teaching on what man really is. Yet all the world's religions, all New Age philosophies, all of Eastern mysticism, and almost all of the Christian-professing world have accepted the very opposite of what the Bible teaches.

Some Major Objections Considered

We now turn to some of the major objections raised against the view that the soul is mortal. We will see in each instance that the objection is not sustained.

Rachel's Departing Soul

Let's begin with Genesis 35:18, which says of Rachel, “And as her soul was departing (for she died), she called his name Benno'ni....” Now does her soul's departing mean that it had a separate, conscious existence?

Samuele Bacchiocchi puts it well in

his book *Immortality or Resurrection?*: “The phrase 'her soul was departing' most likely means that 'her breath was stopping' or, as we might say, she was taking her last sigh. It is important to note that the noun soul—*nephesh* derives from the verb by the same root which means 'to breathe,' 'to respire,' 'to draw breath.' The inbreathing of the breath of life resulted in man becoming a living soul, a breathing organism.

“The departing of the breath of life results in a person becoming a dead soul. Thus as Edmund Jacob explains, 'The departure of *nephesh* is a metaphor for death; a dead man is one who has ceased to breathe.’”

Another text commonly misunderstood is 1 Kings 17:21,22, which says of Elijah: “Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to the Lord, 'O Lord, my God, let this child's soul come into him again.’”

If the soul is not a separate part of the person, how could Elijah make this prayer? The Lord heard Elijah's prayer, “and the soul of the child came into him again and he revived.”

Notice first that in verse 17 it is said that “there was no breath left in him,” which harmonizes well with what we have covered, showing that the departure of the breath of life results in death. It was when God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life that man became a living soul. When the breath of life came back into the widow's son mentioned here, his *nephesh* (or life-force) came back and he became conscious again.

The soul of the child coming back into him simply means that his life returned! Nothing more, nothing less.

Lazarus and the Rich Man

But the most popular of all the misunderstood texts is found in Luke 16, which records the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. For many Christians, this is the single text which seals the issue.

First, note that this was a parable. It was not a real historical event or the reporting or recounting of an actual event. It was a parable, a teaching, a pedagogical device designed to express truths in symbolic or metaphorical terms.

It is important, in looking at parables, to notice the contexts carefully, to see what were the lessons which the storyteller wanted to convey.

Jesus had been teaching on covetousness and stewardship (Luke 16:1-13). Jesus usually selects an appropriate parable to illustrate his ethical teachings. The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus was a classic one showing the rich's insensitivity to and exploitation of the poor.

Many theologians realize that Luke was the Gospel writer most concerned about social and political issues and that his gospel focuses more on the justice and equity issues. (Advocates of “Liberation Theology” are particularly fond of Luke.)

This parable highlights Luke's emphasis on concern for the poor and downtrodden and God's judgment of the selfish and sinful rich. Even the distinguished evangelical theologian

Murray Harris, author of the book *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament*, admits that “the parable of the rich man and Lazarus was told to illustrate the danger of wealth (Luke 6:24) and the necessity of repentance (Luke 16:28-30), not to satisfy our natural curiosity about man's anthropological condition after death.” (See his article, “*The New Testament View of Life after Death*” in the January, 1986, issue of the scholarly journal, *Themelios*.)

Read the entire parable again.

Jesus is emphasizing the importance of the Pharisees and His hearers accepting His message then while He walked among them, for He was the ultimate revelation. For those hearers, that was their window of opportunity. The punch line is in Luke 16:31: “He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead.’”

Persons who knowingly and deliberately reject the truth of the gospel now would not accept it even if they were given another chance after the resurrection. (Of course, every human being will be given one chance and those who reject that one chance will forfeit salvation. Millions of ignorant sinners, however, will get their first chance for salvation after their resurrection. Write for our free brochure entitled *Does God Love the World Enough to Save It?* for a full discussion on this controversial topic.)

If this parable were teaching us about the intermediate state, it would be absolutely irrelevant to the context, as Murray Harris implies. How one can construct a theology of the afterlife based on a parable is beyond exegetical warrant.

An interesting point to show that the rich man in the parable is not suffering the pangs of hell, as described by the preachers, is that the word translated “hell” in the passage is *hades*, the equivalent of the Hebrew *sheol* which means simply the grave—where everyone, including the righteous, go. Only in this parable do we see *hades* used in any way to describe any kind of activity other than dead silence!

Jesus used literary license in this case, which was consistent with the allegorical method He often used.

The Witch of Endor

Perhaps the most challenging passage in the Old Testament for a group like the Church of God International is found in 1 Samuel 28, concerning the witch of Endor and her supposed bringing forth of the prophet Samuel.

Saul had been seeking a word from the Lord as to his encounter with the Philistines, but the Lord had spoken not a word to him, either by dream or through the prophets. In desperation he turned to a medium and asked for Samuel to be brought up. Saul had to disguise himself and go to the witch, for



“The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”

Job 33:4

it was he who had abolished witchcraft in Israel and punished the sorcerers.

But let's read the troubling passages in 1 Samuel 28:11: “Then the woman said, ‘Whom shall I bring up for you?’ He said, ‘Bring up Samuel for me.’ When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice; and the woman said to Saul, ‘Why have you deceived me? You are Saul....’ The woman said to Saul, ‘I see a god coming up out of the earth.’ He said to her, ‘What is his appearance?’ And she said, ‘An old man is coming up; and he is wrapped in a robe.’ And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground, and did obeisance” (verses 11-14). On the surface, this appears to be a pretty devastating passage to our view. But let's examine it more closely.

First, look at the implications from within the doctrinal perspective of the

immortal soul defenders themselves. God, on a number of occasions in the Old Testament, speaks against wizards, mediums, and the like, and in the law pronounces the death penalty for witchcraft. It was that serious (see Leviticus 19:31 and Isaiah 8:19, 20).

Notice, too, that 1 Chronicles 10:13, 14, in reporting on Saul's death, makes the rather striking commentary: “So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance, and did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord slew him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.”

That one act was sufficient to cause Saul to lose his kingdom. But notice what the immortal soul defenders would be saying. They would be asserting, in effect, that Yahweh, who outlawed witches and seers, actually caused one of them to bring up one of His faithful servants, Samuel!

Incidentally, if Samuel was already in Abraham's bosom as a righteous man in heaven, then how was he seen coming up out of the earth? Is that the abode of the righteous? Some believe this, but the evidence against the view that *sheol* had different compartments and was not the common abode of the dead is so

overwhelming that even some immortal soul advocates reject that view. Bacchiocchi documents the case against that view in his book, *Immortality or Resurrection?*, quoting one theologian who defends the immortal soul as saying, “Perhaps most interesting for traditional Christians to note is the fact that it [*sheol*] is the resting place of the dead, irrespective of their religion during life.... There is no doubt that believers and unbelievers all were thought to go to *Sheol* when they die.”

Desmond Alexander, professor of Semitic studies, says in his article on *The Old Testament View of Life after Death* in the January 1986 issue of *Themelios* that “while it is tempting to suggest, especially in light of later Jewish thinking, that in Old Testament times *Sheol* was perceived as consisting of different regions, the biblical texts

themselves do not support such a possibility.”

But let's get back to the Saul-Samuel story. Apart from the gross anomaly of Samuel's coming up from the earth when he was supposed to be in heaven, how do we explain the fact that the righteous man Samuel, apparently by the power of the witch of Endor, cooperates with her in her ungodly craft by actually coming up to see Saul?

Do witches and mediums have the power to rouse the righteous from their heavenly bliss, or from “paradise”? Obviously, this was a satanic impersonation. The fact that the Bible writer says it was Samuel is not meant to be taken on the surface. We have already seen the inexplicable problems with accepting that it was really Samuel. The writer obviously means to convey the point that a person looking exactly like Samuel and representing himself like Samuel was seen. As far as Saul was concerned, it was Samuel who was seen. The narrator mentions a dialogue between Saul and Samuel to advance his point of how Saul reacted to the person

death? If that is so, then he would flatly contradict himself.

In 1 Timothy 4:7,8 Paul says, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me [kept] the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to those who have loved his appearing.”

It was the same Paul who wrote in 1 Corinthians 15 that the dead in Christ would rise “at the last trumpet” (verse 52). He knew when the dead would get their opportunity with the Lord. Was he telling the Philippians one thing and the Corinthians another?

No, Paul was simply telling the Philippians from this prison epistle that with all the pressures and frustrations of his life, with all his suffering, death would be gain to him, for he had the assurance of salvation. He knew that at the next moment of consciousness, he would be with his Lord. For him death would be gain “But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account”

...while it is tempting to suggest, especially in light of later Jewish thinking, that in Old Testament times Sheol was perceived as consisting of different regions, the biblical texts themselves do not support such a possibility.

he thought was Samuel. We can't impose our modern, precise standards of journalism and reporting on the biblical text. The Holy Spirit inspired enough passages to show where the dead really are—unless we are stating flatly that the Bible contradicts itself. That is the only alternative to the view that it was not actually Samuel.

To Die Is Gain

Philippians 1:21 is another misunderstood text: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (verses 21-23).

So did Paul really believe that he would be with Christ immediately upon

(verse 24), for there was much more work to be done. As for him, he could well die and take his rest. We must not read our biases into Scripture, but must let the texts speak for themselves.

Away From the Body

Yet another puzzling text to some is found in 2 Corinthians 5:8, which says, “We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”

Here again Paul writes painfully about his struggles and anguish. “Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling... For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety.”

Paul was longing to reach that stage where death would be swallowed up into victory, when sorrow and pain would be no more; where our very mortal, sin-wracked bodies would be changed into

Christ's glorious body (Philippians 3:21). He was looking forward to the time when “this perishable [body] would put on the imperishable and this mortal nature must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:53).

At the resurrection—not at death—what is now a “physical body” will be raised as a “spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:44). We are only absent from this body at the resurrection! If we read into the biblical texts our Platonic, dualistic notions, then we will come to the wrong conclusions. If we let Scripture interpret itself, we will see that this meaning harmonizes with the rest of the biblical revelation. Notice how Paul juxtaposes his statement about being absent from the body with the resurrection: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive good or evil...” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Thief on the Cross

Certainly one of the most famous stories in all of the Bible is the story of the “thief on the cross.” Jesus promised that repentant sinner, “Truly, I say to you, today you shall be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). If the thief went with Jesus to paradise upon death, then certainly this might prove the immortality of the soul.

But where did Jesus Himself go that day? He went to *sheol* (Hebrew) or *hades* (Greek)—the grave! Jesus was dead for three days and three nights and there is nothing to suggest that His death was different from other humans, with whom he shared a common nature, as Hebrews tells us.

With a simple punctuation mark the problem is solved. What Jesus actually said, was “Truly, I say to you today, you shall [in the future, when the Kingdom of God comes (see verse 42)] be with me in Paradise.”

The original Greek has no punctuation so it is left up to the translators, who naturally have their bias, to supply the punctuation marks. We choose to punctuate it differently, for that is allowable in the Greek and harmonizes with everything we have read so far.

Paradise is not some place that Jesus went the day He died. Paradise is equated in Scripture with the very presence of God (see 2 Corinthians 12:2,

3 and Revelation 2:7).

After Jesus' resurrection on the third day, He told Mary, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father" (John 20:17). Jesus was in the grave for three days before His resurrection, so He could not have meant (when He spoke to the thief) that on the day of His death the thief would join Him in a place where He Himself would not be—heaven.

Clearly, the translators have combined the punctuation with their prejudice!

The Worm That Won't Die

Samuelle Bacchiocchi says Isaiah 66:24 is regarded by traditionalists as the "clearest witness to eternal punishment in the Old Testament" (*Immortality of Resurrection?*). The text says, "And they shall go forth and look on the dead bodies of the men that have rebelled against me for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched..."

We have already dealt with the concept of the unquenchable fire. But what does it mean, "their worm will not die"? Is this contradicting the overwhelming evidence we have seen that man's soul is mortal? Edward Fudge, who, before deeper study, believed man had an immortal soul, comments on this passage in his book, *The Fire That Consumes*:

"Several kinds of flies lay eggs in the flesh of carcasses. The maggots hatched from them serve a beneficial purpose in hastening decomposition. But they also are a symbol of ignominy precisely because they attack only bodies deprived of burial."

Note that point. It is particularly loathsome and contemptible that one's body would be in the open without a proper burial. What better way to portray the ignominy and disgrace of the eternal fate of the wicked?

Keep in mind also Daniel 12:2, which talks about some awakening (in the resurrection) to "everlasting contempt." The same Hebrew word translated "contempt" in Daniel 12:2 (*deraon*) is translated "loathsome" in Isaiah 66:24.

As Bacchiocchi says, "This means that the contempt is caused by the decomposition of their bodies, and not by the never-ending suffering of the wicked."

Notice Jeremiah 25:33, which graphically portrays the disgrace of the fate of the wicked: "And those slain by the Lord on that day shall extend from one end of the earth to the other. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall be dung on the surface of the ground." This is precisely the image of disgrace that fellow-prophet Isaiah wanted to convey in Isaiah 66:24. Their bodies will be left for the worms. "Such discarded corpses are fit only for worms and fire," says Fudge in his book.



Elijah called out to God to bring the widow's son back to life.

1 Kings 17:21-22

Souls Under the Altar

Revelation 6:9-11 is another text used to defend the immortal soul. It speaks about the souls under the altar asking, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?"

Now anyone with the slightest training in theology should realize the danger of using an apocalyptic book, largely employing allegory and symbols, to establish doctrine. If the blood of Abel could cry out from the ground against the injustice of that righteous man's murder (Genesis 4:10), why can't the souls of the saints, as it were, cry out against their martyrdom?

Besides, does anyone really believe that all the saints of the Lord are literally located under the altar? The altar in the

Old Testament was where sacrifices took place. The martyrs had sacrificed not the blood of bulls and goats but their own on God's altar, symbolically. Let's not stretch the Scripture to fit preconceived ideas.

Spirit, Soul, and Body

First Thessalonians 5:23 states, "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless..." This text, which seems to teach a tripartite view of man—spirit, soul, and body—simply means that Paul hoped the Thessalonians would be wholly, thoroughly prepared for the coming of the Lord.

It is similar to Jesus' saying for emphasis in Mark 12:30: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." This does not mean Jesus felt there were four distinct parts to human nature. Soul is used in a variety of ways in Scripture. Paul hoped that they would sanctify their bodies from the works of the flesh, such as fornication; that they would keep their spirit in tune with God's and purify their soul in terms of their consciousness.

Does It Make a Difference?

Winston Churchill once said that some men occasionally stumble upon the truth, but get up, brush themselves off, and go right on as though nothing had happened. Could this describe you? How passionate are you for the pursuit of the truth—the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Are you like the Bereans who "received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11)? Are you doing your best to "present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling [or dissecting] the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15)? Look over all the scriptures, and reason through them (see Acts 17:2).

What are the mathematical odds of your being in touch with a group of people—out of the six billion in the

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You Can't Lose Out on Salvation... or Can You?

Jesus Christ, the God and Savior of mankind, told a young man, “if you will enter into life, keep the commandments!” Paul said, “by grace are ye saved through faith; not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Are these contradictory scriptures? If they are, who has the “weightier” word? If they are not, how can they be reconciled?

“Saved by grace through faith”

Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, wrote, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). Christians use this passage of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians to support a 'no-works' salvation doctrine and use it as a license to disobey the commandments of God, especially the Fourth Commandment, the Sabbath. One of the main doctrines of many 'born-again' groups is that “Jesus nailed the Ten Commandments to the cross” therefore it is no longer to be kept. Jesus allegedly replaced the “Ten Commandments” with the “LOVE Commandment.” But what is Love? How should Christians show “love to God” which is the greatest commandment, and “love to neighbors” which is the second great commandment? The Bible clearly teaches that to love God, one must “not have any other god besides God, not make any graven images as representation of God, not use God's name in vain, and to keep the Sabbath holy and hold a 'holy convocation' on that day to worship God!” (Exodus 20) The Bible also teaches that to show love towards neighbor, one must not “steal, commit murder, commit adultery, bear false witness, and covet anything that belongs to his neighbor” and a person

ought to honor his parents. Does it seem like the Ten Commandments has been done away? Absolutely not, how can it be when the Ten Commandments DEFINE the very essence of Love?

Why did Paul say then that Christians are “saved by grace, not by works” lest any man should boast? Salvation is a gift of God, something He gives with pleasure to His most precious creation—Mankind. But does this mean that whether a man does 'good' or 'bad' that it wouldn't matter? That God, out of His abundant mercy and grace, would save humans regardless of their actions? If the only passage of Scripture that deals with the subject of “salvation” is this letter of Paul to the Ephesians, it would seem so. Fortunately, there are other writings, including Paul's, that give a better understanding on this very important subject.

Keep the Commandments

Matthew quoted Christ as saying, “And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” (Matthew 19:16-17)

The question was very simple and very clear it leaves no room for doubt. The young man is virtually asking Jesus how to be saved, and have eternal life. And Jesus' response was also very clear and definite even a grade school child can understand, “keep the commandments!” Is Jesus teaching a different doctrine than Paul? Jesus was very plain in telling the young man that if he will enter or 'receive' eternal life, he will have to keep the

Commandments. And as if that wasn't clear enough, the young man even asked which commandments, and Jesus was kind enough to indulge him. Jesus' response is found in Matthew 19:18-19:

“He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” (King James Version)

Salvation IS to 'receive eternal life.' Jesus cannot be misunderstood unless one chooses to be blind and decides to go “against” what He is teaching. It is commonly accepted that Paul was personally taught by Jesus Christ, is it possible for Paul to have misunderstood Jesus? Very unlikely. Jesus is very God, the Savior of mankind who offered Himself as a sacrifice. He is all-knowing, all-wise and He has the power to give life and to take it. Is it possible for Jesus to have “misunderstood” the Father's intent that salvation is by grace and not by works? Very unlikely. Could Jesus have forgotten that one does not need to keep the law because salvation is “by grace”?

Matthew's direct quotation of the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 19 is unmistakable. It is contrary to the idea that Jesus came to “keep the law in our place” so that Christians don't have to keep it. To interpret it otherwise is a serious mistake and self-deluding. Besides, if Jesus meant the law will be done away by His sacrifice, this would have been the perfect opportunity to teach that concept. Jesus could have simply told the young man, “Who told you that you have to do anything? Did I not say I came to obey the

law so that you don't have to keep it? I am going to 'nail the law' to the cross and do away with it." But that's not what Jesus said, in fact, Jesus required more from the young man which made him leave with heaviness of heart! (Matthew 19:21-22)

Matthew did not stop quoting Jesus from there, he continued, "Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'" (Matthew 19:23-24)

If there were no 'works' required to enter the Kingdom, Jesus would not have said the "rich" would have a hard time entering the Kingdom. And yet, Jesus said, it would be hard for them, hard enough that it would be easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye. In fact, Jesus is almost saying it's near to impossible for a rich person to make it. How can that be if there were no "works" required for salvation and only "grace" is necessary? The disciples understood it

"go and sin no more..." (John 8:11)

The Parable of the Talent and the Pounds

Two particular parables, Matthew 25 and Luke 19, the Parable of the Talents and the Parable of the Pounds, present a very interesting concept of what the Kingdom of God is like.

Matthew 25:14-30, For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. ... He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strowed: And I was afraid, and went and

them should make Christians think seriously about entering the Kingdom of God. Those whose talents and pounds had gained or increased gained entry into the kingdom but those who had kept theirs, and did not gain anything were thrown into a place where there was "weeping and gnashing of teeth." Again, Jesus is saying Christians are "required" to "do something" or suffer the consequences, being thrown out!

"Not Everyone That Says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Matthew 7: 21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Again, this teaching of Jesus and what Christians of today generally believe are in direct opposition. "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved" is a common phrase spoken by "bus preachers" and "street evangelists" as well as those in the television programs. There will be a group of people, according to Jesus, who believes in Him, calls on Him, but would still be denied entry into the Kingdom unless they do God's will. In fact, he goes a step farther by saying that even if there were "good works" accompanying their belief, like driving out demons, prophesying in Jesus' name, and even performing miracles of healing, that these people will still not enter the Kingdom.

The possibility of losing out on salvation, as implied by the teachings of Jesus Christ himself, is very real. Christians should take heed and listen to Jesus' warning or miss out. There are "works" that one must definitely perform in order to please God and gain entry into that kingdom. Christians must not get comfortable in their perception and definition of "good works" because they may not be the kind of "works" that is expected by God. One interesting concept that is apparent in the teachings of Jesus is that he seems to be more concerned with how men live their lives than anything else. In the famous "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 5-7, the emphasis is heavily placed on personal relations with neighbors than any "doctrinal discussion" or advancement of some "theological concept."

Perhaps one would be wise to ponder on the teachings of Jesus Christ, and even of Paul himself. They were teaching obedience to the commandments and

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

Matthew 7:21

quite clearly, hence their reaction in Matthew 19:25:

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"

Indeed, if there were some very serious requirements like keeping the "entire" Ten Commandments as Jesus clearly pointed out, who can be saved? On the other hand, if "God's grace" is all a Christian needs, without any works, why would Jesus say "if you will enter into life, keep the commandments?" There is no necessity for Jesus to even sacrifice himself if the Father will save humans anyway if "salvation is by grace alone!" However, Jesus made it very clear that obedience to the Ten Commandments is necessary. Is Paul trying to contradict the statement of his very God and Savior Jesus Christ? Is Paul trying to say he knows better than Jesus Christ? Not likely. Yet, in almost every Christian church that one attends, Pastors teach their congregation they are free to break the law because "they are nailed to the cross!" This is definitely contrary to what Jesus told the woman caught in adultery,

hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strowed: Thou oughtest, therefore, to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore, the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (see also Luke 19:12-27).

Jesus starts the parable with "The kingdom of heaven is like..." which means whatever the message he is teaching has to do with becoming a part of that kingdom. These parables show two basic patterns, first, the servants who "performed well" were rewarded and second, the servants who "failed to perform" were thrown out.

How Jesus dealt with each one of

encouraging the disciples to live “good lives”. If there were no “good works” necessary for salvation, why even bother to devote lengthy hours of discussion teaching it?

“Shall not enter into the Kingdom of God”

It is evident that Jesus is an advocate of “salvation by good works.” But what about Paul? Wasn't he teaching “salvation by grace without works”? Didn't Paul say Christians “are saved by grace and not by works lest we should boast?” Is Paul contradicting the very teachings of Jesus Christ, his Savior and God? Contrary to popular belief that Paul is teaching a “salvation by grace without works,” his letters to the Corinthian and Galatian churches specifically mention that not

serious consequences. Engaging in sexual acts outside of marriage is unacceptable to God and those who believe otherwise will not enter the Kingdom. Besides fornication, God also does not like adulterers, effeminate, those who engage in sexual practices with the same sex, thieves, covetous people, drunkards, revilers and no one who practices such will enter the Kingdom. Any Christian who claims God is his Father must be of like mind with his Creator God, and obey Him.

Think about it for a moment, if “works” were unimportant to God and He would save humans regardless of what they do because He is merciful, why would Paul say certain acts would prevent them from entering the Kingdom? Obviously, there are certain “works” that

“Neglect so great a Salvation”

The writer of Hebrews warns that salvation can be neglected:

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.” (Hebrews 2: 3)

Yes, Christians are saved by God's grace and salvation is a gift of God. No amount of great work or performance can make someone earn it. Neither can anyone save himself or give himself immortality no matter how good he is. Only God gives this gift but it is clear that before God grants “immortality,” Christians must do the works that are pleasing to Him. This is precisely what Jesus himself said:

“Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter into the Kingdom of heaven, but ONLY he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21)

And what is the will of the Father? According to Jesus, to believe in Him whom God has sent. (John 6:29) That is to believe in all the teachings of Jesus Christ, to believe in His sacrifice and to trust in His promises! And how can one gain eternal life and enter the Kingdom? First, Jesus said, “keep the commandments.” Second, according to Paul, to stay away from the “works of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:19-21)

In the simplest of terms, salvation is dependent upon obedience or disobedience to God. Was Paul correct in saying “by grace are ye saved through faith, not of yourselves, it is the gift of God?” Definitely! It is through belief and faith in Jesus Christ through God's grace that we are saved, not by our own power or goodness, because salvation is a gift of God! [Rene D. Corpuz, **AG**]

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

I Corinthians 6:9-10

everyone will enter the kingdom because of some “works.”

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” (I Corinthians 6:9-10, see also Galatians 5:19-21).

This present generation believes that “fornication” or having sexual relations outside of marriage is an acceptable practice. God, however, does not share this belief. He requires the acceptance of His righteous standards or there will be

is so displeasing to God the result of which He will choose not to apply grace or mercy.

Paul is correct in teaching that salvation is a gift of God. But he is nowhere saying there is nothing you need to do in order to receive that gift. Paul is teaching that one's “self-righteousness” cannot force or oblige God to give eternal life. One can't buy immortality with his show of “good works”. But if Christians do the things that are pleasing to God, be obedient to Him and attain that level of maturity that Jesus, Paul and all the apostles were teaching 2000 years ago, God is going to grant that precious gift of immortality.

The Church of God, International welcomes everyone who wishes to attend its weekly meetings. We encourage you to bring along your family and friends. Admittance is absolutely FREE. You can also avail of our literature which are FREE for the asking.

Our weekly meeting schedule are as follows:

1st Saturday of the month
2:00 to 4:00 pm
Lubang Function Room
Edsa Plaza Hotel

2nd to 4th Saturday of the month
10:00 am to 12:00 nn
6th Floor, Peaksun Building
1505 Princeton St., cor. Shaw Blvd.
Mandaluyong City, Metro Manila



Line Upon Line

"For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept: line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little..." *Isaiah 28:10*



Understanding Faith

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

We live in a materialistic world that is fast becoming morally bankrupt—a world which rejected God and His ways from the very beginning. Our first parents lived in a beautiful paradise called Eden. Adam was to be the caretaker of the Garden of Eden, and Eve was to be his helper. There is much to learn about the original Eden, but for now, suffice it to say that Adam and Eve did not listen to the Lord God their Creator, but listened to Satan the devil. It was at this point in time that the decision was made to follow their own way.

As we learned in the previous lesson from a proverb, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). Adam and Eve established themselves as their own greatest authority. Mankind has been following its own chosen way ever since. We have no faith toward God our Creator. We do not trust God to guide us. In a sense, we have become our own god! Yet you hear people all the time, after a great disaster, asking in a complaining voice, "Why did God let this happen?" God had nothing to do with it. Man rejected its Creator in the beginning, and now all mankind experiences this great rejection of God. God has taken a "hands off" approach to man and has given man at least six thousand years to see his error. At this time in our lives, we have an opportunity

to receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, to repent, and to return to God our Creator.

God's ultimate design is to bring every human being from the human level to the "dead works" we must repent of—Sin. All of our ways, actions, and works, which lead to death, are simply defined as sin. We must stop serving the lusts and desires of our own flesh and begin to serve others. When we demonstrate to God this willingness to change, He then applies the sacrifice of Christ to us, purging our conscience "from dead works to serve the living God" (Hebrews 9:14).

God our Father is a great, most wonderful and compassionate, loving Being. We of ourselves cannot repent, or on our own come up with the deep feeling of abhorrence for our sins and our own utter wretchedness. We must have help to understand before we can see ourselves as we really are. God is our Helper. This understanding must come from Him, for the goodness of God leads you to repentance" (Romans 2:4).

God is the one who grants repentance (2 Timothy 2:25). It is God Himself who helps us to see our own wretchedness and shortcomings. He opens our minds and starts us on the pathway toward repentance and ultimately, reconciliation with Him.

When we started school, we first learned our A-B-C's. In a similar manner, we must commence our

Christian life by learning the "first principles of the oracles of God," the "elementary principles of Christ" (Hebrews 5:12; 6:1). We must first be totally grounded on the basics. When first converted, the new Christian is likened to one that uses milk, unskillful in the Word of Righteousness because he is a babe in Christ (Hebrews 5:13).

But what are the elementary principles of Christ? What is the "milk" of the Word? What specific doctrines of the Bible should we first begin to learn? Where are they found in the Bible?

We are given a list in Hebrews 6:1, 2: (1) repentance from dead works; (2) faith towards God; (3) the doctrine of baptisms; (4) the laying on of hands; (5) the resurrection of the dead; and (6) eternal judgment. We will bring an in-depth study of each of these principles of Christ in future lessons.

We believe very strongly in putting on "the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11-17). We believe that every Christian should be clothed with it, "above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one" (verse 16).

Final Instructions

Don't forget to have your Bible close at hand. This is a study of your Bible, not a study of the words we send you. You must not build your faith on

what we say, but on what the Bible says!

You must look up and read in the Bible every scriptural reference in these lessons for yourself. You must study each verse in your own Bible to determine if what we say is so!

A dictionary will be helpful to you also. Take the time to write down each verse in your notebook, along with your own thoughts. It takes more time, but you really will remember more and learn the lesson.

Remember, these lessons are designed to help you learn God's will. God's will is revealed in the Bible. You must know His holiness and His character. You must know and understand the great purpose He is working out here on earth, and the promises He makes in His Word.

Knowing these things is important in many ways, but it is important in one very particular way—and that way is *prayer*.

If we are not familiar with God's will, we will go to Him in prayer timidly. Some are afraid to ask God for His blessings and they hang back in doubt. Because they are not sure of God's will, they ask half-heartedly. Notice what the author of the book of Hebrews tells us:

"Let us therefore come *boldly* to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16; read also James 5:16).

From these verses we learn that we are to approach God's glorious throne with *boldness*, and with a sense of *fervency* and *urgency*!

The apostle John reminds us that "if we ask anything according to [God's] will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14). This is our confidence in Him, John says.

So pray *boldly* to God. You are diligently searching Him out in these lessons. Ask Him for help in understanding His Word, the Bible. Pray for the welfare of others who need healing. Pray for God's work. Pray for God's ministers. Your fervent prayers can accomplish miracles!

Understanding Faith

Faith is one of the primary, foundational principles of Christ (Hebrews 6:1), and we must have it for salvation. But we must also understand that while "dead works" cannot save us, neither can good works save us. Only God can save us through Jesus Christ.

However, when we turn from dead works to the Living God, and begin obeying Him, we are then able to perform "good works." If we did not believe that God could save us through Christ Jesus, there would be no purpose in obeying Him. But by faith, we know He can save us. However, we must please God and be pleasing to Him. The author of Hebrews tells us it is impossible to please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6)! This verse echoes the words of Habakkuk 2:4: "But the just shall live by his faith." So then, we as Christians *should* walk and live our lives by faith (Romans 1:17)!

Merely believing that God exists is only the beginning, for even the demons believe that much (James 2:19, 20). God will not be satisfied with a mere acknowledgment of His existence. He wants a personal, life-transforming relationship with you. If you will diligently seek Him, you will be rewarded with eternal life in His kingdom.

Therefore, followers of Christ, look forward to promises and rewards, which are not yet seen (2 Corinthians 5:7; Colossians 3:1-4). The faith we must attain to is the assurance that God's Word is true, that His promises are certain. God cannot and will not change or lie (Hebrews 6:18). The result of God's promise and oath is our "strong consolation." The unchanging character of God assures believers of the fulfillment of everything, which He has promised.

Review

1. *Faith is a foundational principle.*
2. *God loves the world.*
3. *God gave His Son.*
4. *Those who believe upon Him will not perish.*
5. *We cannot please God without faith.*
6. *We must live our lives by faith.*
7. *Christians look for promises and rewards that are not seen.*
8. *Merely believing in God's existence is not enough. We must obey Jesus.*
9. *God cannot lie. His name is unchangeable. His promises are sure.*

Scripture to Read, Remember, and Recite:

Hebrew 6:1; John 3:16, 17; Hebrews 11:6; Habakkuk 2:4; Romans

1:17; James 2:19, 20; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Colossians 3:1-4; Hebrews 6:18

Abraham's Example

God called Abraham out of his country, the land he was living in with all his relatives (Genesis 12:1). Abraham did not whine or argue with God; he simply obeyed. In faith Abraham did as God commanded him (Hebrews 11:8; Genesis 12:4, 5).

Abraham was not called the father of the faithful for no good reason. His example tells us what constitutes real faith. God promised Abraham that he would become a "father of many nations" (Romans 4:17). Yet he was childless at ninety-nine and his wife Sarah was well past the childbearing age. But Abraham did not look at the fact of Sarah's *being barren* or to his own apparent impotence. He looked only to God's promise to make him a father. Abraham's faith was in the God "who gives life to the dead" and in the God who actually creates new existences. Abraham, "contrary to hope, in hope believed" (verse 18).

Believing that God could bring the dead back to life, Abraham trusted in the omnipotence (unlimited power) of God. When God told him, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars...So shall your descendants be," Abraham responded with faith. "And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:5, 6; cf. Galatians 3:6).

Notice that God promised Abraham the land of Canaan, or Palestine, as an inheritance (Genesis 12:7). This inheritance was conditional; based on Abraham being obedient: "[W]alk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant between Me and you..." (Genesis 17:1, 2). This promise to Abraham said that "in you *all* the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

Before God made the promised inheritance unconditional He tested Abraham again. God promised Abraham and his wife Sarah a son, and through this son his family would expand greatly (Genesis 17:15-17, 19). Despite their great age, they waited in faith for their promised son (Romans 4:18-21; Hebrews 11:11, 12).

Imagine it. Abraham was seventy-five years old when God called him into the land of promise. Sarah was well

beyond the age of childbearing. This alone was a miracle. He continued to wait patiently and faithfully for the next twenty-five years, until their promised son, Isaac, was born (Genesis 21:5).

In Genesis 22:1, 2 we find God testing the faith of Abraham in a very dramatic, heart-wrenching way. God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac.

In verse 3 we see that Abraham immediately had a heart of obedience. He did not question God's command or even ask why. He just obeyed.

Abraham knew that God had promised he would be a father of many nations. He had complete trust and faith that God would carry out His promise to him (James 2:23; Romans 4:21; Hebrew 11:17-19).

For three days, as Abraham journeyed toward Mount Moriah, Isaac was as good as dead in the heart and mind of Abraham. The "knife" was in his outstretched hand, about to slay his son (Genesis 22:10) at this moment Abraham figuratively "offered up his only begotten son" (Hebrews 11:17-19).

It was now evident to God that Abraham would surely sacrifice his son Isaac. At the last moment God intervened (Genesis 22:11-13).

God knew for sure now, by Abraham's total commitment without question, that he would always obey. God proved Abraham to be faithful (Nehemiah 9:7, 8). So Abraham is referred to as "the father of the faithful" (Romans 4:16). Abraham obeyed God fully in every way (Genesis 26:5).

So Abraham did not stagger at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. "[A]nd being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform" (Romans 4:21). So there we have it. A biblical example of obedient faith.

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is often referred to as the "faith chapter" of the Bible, and in this chapter is contained God's definition of faith.

Many people make the mistake of confusing faith with emotions. They try to "work up" faith; that is, some kind of emotional feeling. But these feelings are not the evidence of having faith.

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1, NIV). God's promise was all the evidence Abraham needed! Without the kind of living faith Abraham demonstrated, we can never be

born into God's kingdom. We are also told in Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

Therefore, Spirit-begotten Christians "walk" live their lives—by faith. "Now the just shall live by faith" (Hebrew 10:38). These words were first uttered 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; without it we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6). Christ described faith as a weightier matter of the law (Matthew 23:23). Paul listed it among the three greatest Christian virtues: faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Faith is an evidence—"the evidence of things not seen." Faith precedes the actual receiving of what we hope for. You do not see it or feel it; yet faith is your "evidence" that you shall have it.

Review

1. *Abraham did not whine or cry about leaving his home and relatives. He simply obeyed immediately.*
2. *He dwelt in the land of promise as a stranger.*
3. *In faith Abraham did as God commanded.*
4. *At this time Abraham was seventy-five years old.*
5. *God promised that Abraham would be the father of many nations.*
6. *Even though he was childless at ninety-nine, Abraham still trusted God.*
7. *Sarah was beyond the childbearing age.*
8. *The just shall live by faith.*
9. *Hebrews 11 is known as the "faith chapter," because the biblical definition of faith is there.*
10. *God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.*
11. *Abraham believed God could resurrect the dead.*
12. *Because Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son without question, God made His promises to Abraham unconditional.*
13. *God proved Abraham to be faithful.*
14. *Because Abraham was faithful,*

he became known as the father of the faithful.

Scriptures to Read, Remember, and Recite

Genesis 12:1; Hebrews 11:8; Genesis 12:4, 5; Romans 4:17, 18; Genesis 15:6; Galatians 3:6; Genesis 12:7; 17:1, 2' 22:17; Romans 4:13; Genesis 17:15-17, 19; Romans 4:18-21; Hebrews 11:11, 12; Genesis 21:5; 22:1-3; James 2:23; Romans 4:21; Hebrews 11:17-19; Genesis 22:12; 22:10; Hebrews 11:19; Genesis 22:11-22; Nehemiah 9:7, 8; Romans 4:16; Genesis 26:5; Hebrews 10:38; 1 Corinthians 13:13.

Obeying by Faith

Unbeknownst to many people who profess being Christian, their belief is a "dead faith." It is not enough to "believe" in Jesus Christ and the fact of His sacrifice for the sins of mankind. Remember what we learned in Lesson 1: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). So there are good works to be done, and these cannot be done with a dead faith.

The true Christian will obey God and do good works, for "faith without works is dead" (James 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" (verse 18). If we do not obey God, we possess nothing but a "dead faith," which is no better than that of the demons who themselves being in the presence of God refuse to obey Him (verse 19).

Please notice what the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans: "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law" (Romans 3:31). By these words of Paul we see that faith established law.

James goes on to remind us of the faith of Abraham—how he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar. By his works, because he was willing to do this, Abraham was shown to be justified (James 2:21-24; Genesis 22:16-18).

Also, Rahab the harlot was shown to be justified by works, because she believed the miracles that the Lord God had performed in bringing out the Israelites from Egypt. So she hid the messengers and had them sent out another way (James 2:25; Joshua 2:4, 6,

15).

Faith establishes the law, and by obeying the law, faith is made perfect.

Take note of the fact that we are legally justified—forgiven of our past sins, reconciled to God—through our faith in the sacrifice of Christ (Romans 3:21-26, 28).

Notice also that only those that obey God's spiritual law are justified (Romans 2:13).

Jesus will save us *from* our sins, not *in* our sins. There are prior demands, in this order: we must believe, repent, and have a willing heart to obey. We are justified, or forgiven of our past sins, by our faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ, not by being law keepers (Romans 3:20). But this justification is conditional. We must repent of transgressing God's law, and then begin obeying by the power of the Holy Spirit we receive after baptism by the laying on of hands.

We who are now justified live our lives of obedience by faith (Hebrews 10:38; Romans 1:17)!

Now we can begin to understand that it is by the faith of Christ Himself that we are enabled to live a righteous and obedient life in harmony with God's spiritual law (Philippians 3:9; Romans 3:22).

We do not need to live our lives by our own puny faith; we can have the very faith of Jesus Christ. See how clearly Paul tells us that Christ lived in him: Galatians 2:20; Philippians 2:5; Romans 8:9, 10. The apostle Paul did not live his life anymore by his own faith. Christ dwelt in Paul through the power of the Holy Spirit. So Paul received the faith of Jesus Christ, and so can we.

We find in Romans 13:10 that love is the fulfilling of the law. Continuing this theme, we find again in Romans 5:5 that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Now that we have the love of God we need to fulfill and obey the law.

We of ourselves do not have the kind of love that fulfills God's law and makes us righteous. Love is of God, for God is love (1 John 4:16). The law is spiritual (Romans 7:14). By nature we are carnal (Romans 8:7). It is easy to see that it takes a spiritual love to fulfill a spiritual law. Therefore, the Holy Spirit we receive after repentance and baptism makes it possible to live an obedient life to God. We no longer establish our own righteousness, but the righteousness of God.

Review

1. *Just "believing" Is not enough. We must obey.*
2. *Faith without obedience, or works, is a dead faith.*
3. *Demons tremble in the presence of God but do not obey.*
4. *Faith establishes law; it does not cancel it.*
5. *Abraham was shown to be justified by his works—producing faith.*
6. *Rahab the harlot was shown to be justified by her works—producing faith.*
7. *By obedience to the law, faith is made perfect.*
8. *We are not justified by the deeds of the law.*
9. *Once we believe, repent, are baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, we then can live an obedient life in harmony with God's spiritual law.*
10. *We do not live our lives by our puny faith, but by the faith of Christ.*
11. *Love is the fulfilling of the law.*
12. *The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit we received.*
13. *Love is of God, for God is love.*
14. *We no longer establish our own righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ.*

Scriptures to Read, Remember, and Recite

Ephesians 2:10; James 18:20; Romans 3:31; Genesis 22:16-18; James 2:21-24; Joshua 2:4, 6, 15; James 2:25; Romans 3:23-26, 28; 2:13; 3:20; 1:17; Philippians 3:9; Romans 3:22; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 2:5; Romans 8:9, 10; 13:10; 5:5; 1 John 4:16; Romans 7:14; 8:7.

The Living Faith of Jesus

Jesus Christ had more faith than any man that has ever lived. The godly life He lived and the miracles He performed were not done by supernatural powers. Everything He did was done by faith in His Father, setting for us a marvelous example.

Jesus clearly told those of His time that He came bringing a message from God His Father to mankind (John 8:38, 42).

Jesus, as the messenger of the New Covenant, spoke for God. In Matthew 19:16-21, we are told about a conversation Jesus had with a young man. The young man asked Jesus "what good thing" he should do to gain eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments, and went on to enumerate a number of them. The young man said he had done this from his youth. Jesus discerned this young man's problem as being his wealth. So He told him to give away his wealth and follow Him. The young man went away in sorrow.

This showed the weakness of the young man. He had made a god of his wealth and it became his "idol" before God (see Colossians 3:5). By letting his riches stand in his way of God, the young man was in violation of the first and greatest commandment, which we find in Matthew 22:36-38.

There is no question that Jesus taught that we should keep His Father's law, and that the law included the Ten Commandments. Jesus kept His Father's commandment, and kept them perfectly. Jesus told His disciples that, of Himself, he could do nothing (John 5:30).

God the Father who lived in Jesus through His Holy Spirit did the works Christ performed, and made it possible for him to live an obedient life. Jesus Christ had total faith in God the Father (John 14:10).

Review

1. *Jesus was sent by His Father with a message.*
2. *When a young man asked Jesus what good thing he should do to gain eternal life, Jesus said, "Keep the Commandments."*
3. *We must put God first in our life.*
4. *Covetousness, or anything that is first in our life before God, is an idol.*
5. *We are to love God with all our heart, mind, and soul.*
6. *We should love our neighbor as ourselves.*
7. *Jesus said He could do nothing of Himself.*

Scriptures to Read, Remember, and Recite

John 8:38, 42; Matthew 19:16-21; Colossians 3:5; Matthew 22:36-38; John 5:30; 14:10

Attaining the Faith of Christ

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have the faith of Jesus? Well, we can have His faith!

The very faith of Jesus Christ, by which we receive eternal salvation, is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

By reading Galatians 5:22 we will learn what the fruit of Spirit is. Take note of the fact that faith is one of the virtues of the Spirit! When we receive the Holy Spirit we receive all of these virtues, and faith is among them.

We were not born with the kind of faith Jesus had, but God wants us to have this living faith, to repent and turn to Him. It is this faith of Christ that enables us to obey God's spiritual law. The Holy Spirit furnishes us with this gift of faith.

What must we do to gain this living faith of Jesus Christ? The answer is found in Peter's words: "Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

No one can come to Jesus Christ unless the Father draws him (John 6:44). We first experience this drawing to Jesus by the Father, making it possible to commence with repentance in our life.

Once we start on the road of repentance, accepting Christ as our personal Savior, once we are baptized and receive God's Holy Spirit, we can then repeat the words of the apostle Paul: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

Review

1. *Faith is a gift of God.*
2. *Faith is a fruit of God's Holy Spirit.*
3. *The faith of Christ enables us to keep God's spiritual-law.*
4. *To gain this faith, we must repent and be baptized, and thereby receive God's Holy Spirit.*
5. *No one can come to Christ unless the father draws him.*
6. *You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you!*

Scriptures to Read, Remember, and Recite

Ephesians 2:8, 9; Galatians 5:22; Acts 2:38; John 6:44; Philippians 4:13.

AG

Free Bible Study Lectures

continued from page 2

June 02, 2001, Saturday

What is the True Gospel?

The word 'gospel' means 'good news.' Why can't churches agree on what it is? If they all preach the same 'gospel,' why are their messages different? It's time you learn the truth about the real gospel preached by Jesus Christ!

July 07, 2001, Saturday

Who, What is God?

Just who is God? Does He really exist? Does He care about human affairs? Is God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ "one and the same person" with the Holy Spirit? Or is the Father a separate and distinct Being from Jesus and both are Gods?

August 04, 2001, Saturday

What is the Kingdom of God?

Jesus said, 'Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand,' where is this Kingdom now? Is the Church the Kingdom of God? Is this Kingdom in the hearts of men or is it in Heaven? How can we enter that Kingdom? These Bible Studies include a 30-minute video presentation, a brief lecture by the Host Minister, and a "Question and Answer" discussion. All the meetings are free of charge. There are no collections. Free brochures and reading materials will be available. Please bring along your families, and friends.

Your presence will be most appreciated. Should you have further inquiries, please don't hesitate to get in touch with the office or any of the ministers listed above. **AG**

Immortality —

God's Gift to the Saints

continued from page 11

world today—who reject the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, a doctrine accepted by every one of the major world religions and almost every one of the over 26,000 Christian churches (yes, it's that many!)?

What are the odds of your finding a group which can put together the scriptures we have, showing the truth about what man is?

Well, you have beaten the odds and here you are with the truth in your hands. God has so designed it that you would get this truth. How will you show your appreciation?

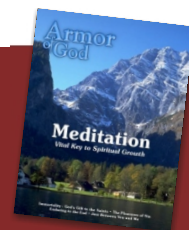
We suggest that you write for other literature from us to see what other surprises might be in store.

In the meantime, remember the words quoted earlier in this article from immortal-soul defender John Cooper in his book *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting*: "If what they [his opponents] are saying is true, then two disturbing conclusions immediately follow.

"First, a doctrine affirmed by most of the Christian churches since its beginning is false. A second consequence is personal and existential—what millions of Christians believe will happen when they die is also a delusion."

Is God the author of confusion and delusion? **AG**

If you missed the first part of this article, request for your free copy of *The Armor of God* April-June 2000 issue.



Scriptures for Inspiration

"To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life." Romans 2:7

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23

The 'Rest' of the Story

The Sabbath can be traced back to creation. It was prominent in the Ten Commandments and it was observed by Jesus and the apostles and many thousands keep it today. But are we short-changing God's Sabbath? Are we guilty of treating it as just "a day off"? If you can wrap your mind around or better yet, embrace the full spiritual implications of the Sabbath, you'll be able to revolutionize your weekly Sabbath-keeping!

You're tired after working a full week. The boss had been riding your back, you lost some important clients, and you had to work late four evenings in a row.

But since you keep not just the Nine but the *Ten* Commandments, you are blessed to have "a day off." Late Friday afternoon, the strained muscles in your neck and the tense look on your face begin to loosen up and relax, for you know that God said there are six days in which to do all your work, but you are to rest on the seventh day, the Sabbath.

What a commandment! What a blessing to have a regularly "approved" day off of work each week!

But answer this: Does the Sabbath's value rest only in the fact that it's "a day off"? Is that the limit of the Sabbath's meaning and purpose? Are we, above all others, God's *true* children merely because we know which day not to work?

Let's get a grip on the Sabbath's primary value so we as God's people can more fully rejoice on His Sabbath day! To begin our short study, let's go to the beginning.

Creation and the Sabbath

God prepared the earth during *[the]* Creation Week for one purpose: so it would be suitable for the habitation of His ultimate creation, man. On day one of Creation, God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good" (Genesis 1:3, 4). On day two, God made the sky (verse 8). On the third day, He made land, seas, plants, and trees, and "God saw that it was good" (verse 12). The next day He made the lights in the sky to govern the day and the night. "And God saw that it was good" (verse 18). On the fifth day God created the fish of the sea and the

birds of the air. "And God saw that it was good" (verse 21).

Now on the sixth day, after creating the rest of the animals, "God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (verse 27). After creating His masterpiece—man—God looked at all He had created, and it wasn't just "good"; "it was *very* good" (verse 31).

The Creation narrative is written in such a way that *[it]* separates man from the animals. The days of Creation found their climax in the creation of man. Man is set apart, on a higher level. God made man in His own image. Man is exactly like God in many aspects, he has been given many of God's attributes. Man was given dominion over the earth, and he was created with the ability to think, decide, create, solve problems, and express a wide range of emotions. The mind of man is markedly of greater brilliance than that of any of the animals. The reason for all this is that God made us to be His own children, to fellowship with Him and with fellow man as members of God's family.

After His "magnum opus," the creation of man, God rested from all of His labor. "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (2:3).

Don't miss the significance. After placing man on this specially prepared earth—man being the pinnacle of Creation Week—God rested. He rested not because His divine energies were sapped, not because He was exhausted from an exceptionally hard week's work, but because He had finally created the first of His children.

Simply put, with the advent of man, God's work of Creation was over—and so He entered into rest, waiting with open arms to be joined in this rest by His children.

The Fall of Man

But our first parents, Adam and Eve, ignored the invitation—that is, they did not comply with the loving direction of their Father. The story of their “fall” in the Garden of Eden is told in the second and third chapters of Genesis.

The Creator told Adam and Eve that they could eat the fruit of all the trees in the Garden—almost. There were two noteworthy trees in the middle of the Garden: one was the tree of life, and the other was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The latter was the only tree in the Garden that God strictly forbade to be used for food. The penalty for disobedience was death.

But the crafty, cunning serpent (representative of a higher embodiment of evil—see Romans 16:20 and Revelation 12:9) led Eve astray from the clear parameters drawn and issued by God. She disobeyed and ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and she in turn caused Adam to commit this same sin of disobedience. Now, unlike before when man was innocent and when God described His creation as “very good,” there was sin in the world. This sin separated man from full fellowship with God (cf. Isaiah 59:1); thus, man was violently removed from the “rest” God intended to share with him—thanks, in part, to the serpent’s diabolical influence.

In the end, however, the serpent will not stand as the victor. “You will crawl on your belly,” God told the serpent, “and you will eat dust all the days of your life” (verse 14). God was not talking about the snake’s diet or how it will carry itself bodily; He was describing the certainty of his utter defeat (cf. Psalm 72:9; Isaiah 49:23; 65:25; Micah 7:17). The serpent will eventually lose the war.

In His grace, God provided a means to rescue man and restore him to full rest and fellowship with his Creator. He poetically described the means when He told the serpent, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring

and hers; *he will crush your head*, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

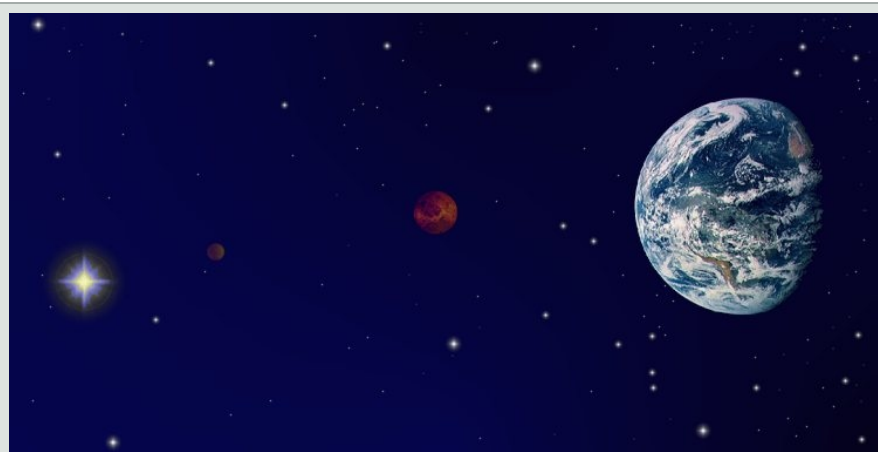
We understand that her “offspring,” ultimately, was Jesus Christ, who figuratively “stomped on the devil” through His earthly life’s work—notably His death and bodily resurrection.

This truth is well stated in Hebrews 2:14,15: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might *destroy* him who holds the power of death—that is, *the devil*—and

“remember” the Sabbath because they had previously been given instructions pertaining to the Sabbath as it related to gathering their food, or “manna” (chapter 16).

But within the Fourth Commandment a reason—a meaning—is given:

“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (verse 11; see also 31:17).



“And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating he had done.”

Genesis 2:3

This commandment pointed back to the Creation described in the first two chapters of Genesis. As we saw earlier, this “Creation” involved God specially preparing the earth for man, who, unlike any of the other creatures, was created after God’s own “image” and “likeness.” Man was uniquely created to enjoy a perfect familial relationship with God—pure and untainted by sin. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve disobeyed God, separating

themselves from God. Their iniquity prevented them from having the proper relationship that their holy God so desired to have with them.

By the time Moses repeated the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, in preparation for the people’s entrance into the land of promise, the Sabbath commandment had picked up a national meaning as well. The basic premise, though, was the same. He said, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. *Therefore* the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day” (verse 15). The Israelites were in bondage while in Egypt, but God delivered them and was bringing them rest.

But after the people of Israel came out from under Egyptian bondage, and after they saw many miraculous signs and wonders from God, they repeatedly proved themselves rebellious and unbelieving. Their sinful hearts so angered God that, even though He said, “I have forgiven them” (Numbers 14:20), He avowed that “not one of them will ever see the land I promised on

Israel and the Sabbath

Because of sin, which came into the world at the beginning, “death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses” (Romans 5:14). Through Abraham, and later through Moses, God was working out His plan for man’s redemption—to bring him back into His rest and fellowship.

In the time of Moses, God thundered out the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai to the children of Israel, who had until recently been slaves in Egypt. Prominent in these great commandments was the Fourth:

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates” (Exodus 20:8-10).

The physical aspect of the Sabbath is not easy to misunderstand. It is simply: don’t work. The Israelites were told to

oath to their forefathers” (verse 23).

Listen to how the insightful Psalmist described God's judgment against these rebellious people:

“For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest’” (Psalm 95:10,11).

While that generation was not permitted to enter the promised land, the next generation did enter it. Moses did not enter, however, because in his anger he showed disrespect to God's holiness in the sight of the Israelites (Numbers 20:12); so Joshua the son of Nun was commissioned to be Moses' successor, to lead the children of Israel into the land (Numbers 27:18-23). Joshua would finally lead the people into the

the writer quotes from Psalm 95, which describes the sinfulness of those in Moses' time whose hearts went astray in the wilderness. As we've read, it concludes with, “So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest’” (verse 11).

The writer then reiterates and reinforces why the children of Israel were forbidden entrance into the “rest,” or promised land. They “*rebelled*” (verse 16); they “*sinned*” (verse 17); they “*disobeyed*” (verse 18). “So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their *unbelief*” (verse 19). We should learn from their wrong example. We should avoid rebellion, sin, disobedience, and unbelief, because if we do, we read that we can enter a “rest” that is much more valuable than any land inheritance.

Now let's read chapter 4, uninterrupted, verses 1 through 11:

“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.”

Hebrews 4:9-11

land of “rest” their home sweet home—from under the tyranny of foreign powers.

The Remaining “Sabbath-Rest”

Let's turn our attention now to the book of Hebrews. In the clearest way, chapters 3 and 4 bring out the fullness of the Sabbath's meaning for us. The context of the entire book, of course, is the superiority of Christ. He is greater than the angels, greater than Moses, greater than the Levitical priesthood, greater than the old system of animal sacrifices. The book of Hebrews, then, which includes discussions on various “Jewish” practices from a profoundly Christian perspective, should force us to see the Fourth Commandment in a brand-new light—one that enhances and brings greater meaning to our worship.

Chapter 3 of Hebrews says to “fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess” (verse 1). But even after you “fix your thoughts on Jesus,” says the writer, you must guard your heart from going astray; you must guard against turning to unbelief. “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God” (verse 12).

Ancient Israel is aptly used to illustrate this kind of unbelief (3:7-19). In verses 7-11,

“Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. *Now we who have believed enter that rest*, just as God has said, ‘So I declared on oath in my anger, “They shall never enter my rest. And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: ‘And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.’ And again in the passage above he says, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

“It *still remains* that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There *remains*, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters *God's rest* also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make

every effort to *enter* that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.”

If you followed along with the context, this passage should be crystal clear!

God rested on the seventh day of Creation. This rest—God's rest—is the one “we who have believed” enter into. It is called “his rest” (verse 1), “that rest” (verses 3,6,11), and “God's rest” (verse 10), and God calls it “my rest” (verses 3,5). And only those who refuse to follow Israel's “example of disobedience” may enter; all others “will fall” (verse 11).

When the writer says we can enter “rest,” he's not saying that Christians literally enter the land of Canaan promised to Abraham. We enter a *superior* rest. The promised-land rest only typified the ultimate redemptive rest we can have in God. Israel, because of her “disobedience,” was eventually taken captive and scattered from the land anyway, so it wasn't a true, permanent rest after all.

The ultimate “rest,” however, contrasted with the promised-land rest, is full spiritual communion with God. The Israelites could have entered this kind of rest eventually had they been obedient and pursued it by faith (4:2; cf. Romans 9:32), but they did not. That's why the writer of Hebrews says, “For if Joshua had given them rest [*true rest*], God would not have spoken later about another day” (Hebrews 4:8). They received a kind of temporary “rest,” but not the “real deal” which the promised-land rest typified.

Most significant is this: While it was Joshua who led the Israelites into *their* rest, it is Jesus Christ who leads spiritual Israelites into “God's rest”! In other words, compliant with the theme of the book of Hebrews, *the Sabbath points to Jesus Christ our Savior!*

Don't let anyone hoodwink you into believing the Sabbath is archaic, useless, or in any way void of Christian relevance. Looking back, from this side of the cross, we have twenty-twenty vision. We can see the full richness of meaning that has been intrinsic to the Sabbath all along—going all the way back to day seven!

Many Sunday-keepers will object to modern-day Sabbath-keeping by saying, “But Jesus is our Sabbath, so since we have the Reality we don't need to keep the old law.”

And to be honest, they're right about Jesus being our “Sabbath.” Of course, He's not the seventh day of the week—and the Fourth Commandment was *definitely* speaking of days of the week—but still it is

just as plain that He is our "Sabbath" in the same sense that He is "our Passover lamb" (1 Corinthians 5:7) or our "high priest" (Hebrews 3:1) *who will GIVE us that ultimate rest.*

But does this mean the Sabbath command is now abrogated, abolished, or designated as a "Jewish custom"? Don't be hasty to jump to conclusions.

The apostles continued going to the synagogues long after the ascension of Christ. "Every Sabbath," while the apostle Paul was in Corinth, "he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4).

After Paul's sermon to Jews and gentiles in Psidian Antioch, he and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue when the gentiles "invited them to speak further about these things on the *next Sabbath*" (13:42). So "the *next Sabbath* almost the whole city [including many gentiles] gathered to hear the word of the Lord" (verse 44). If it was Paul's eager ambition to demolish Sabbath-keeping in his time, he certainly did not help this cause here. He continued to speak to Jews and gentiles on the Sabbath day.

But there is an often-ignored aspect of the Sabbath which should be considered by our Sunday-keeping friends: *The Sabbath's "rest" will not be fulfilled completely until the Second Coming!*

This is most important to note! It's true that certain things such as the Sabbath "are a shadow of the things that were to come," and that "the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Colossians 2:17; see also Hebrews 10:1). *But since we are still looking forward to the Second Coming, which will be the consummation of our rest in Him, the Sabbath's meaning has yet to be exhausted!*

Rest and fellowship with God cannot be fully had while we are mortal flesh, subject to aches, pains, weaknesses, sin, and death. But the time is coming when we will see the returning Lord Jesus Christ, "who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:21).

When we are freed from the burden of our earthly bodies, then we will truly be free. The apostle Paul writes that we, "who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we are saved..." (Romans 8:23,24).

If our rest in Christ is fully completed now, then Paul would not have written (in context of the future resurrection), "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (1 Corinthians

15:19), or, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be *made alive* [from the dead]" (verse 22; cf. Romans 5:18).

So now that we know all of these, what should you be doing?

You and the Sabbath

If you are not entering it already, you need to enter into God's rest. You have the knowledge and understanding it takes to enter, but you need to repent of your sins while you still have this window of opportunity. That's what it means when the writer of Hebrews says that God has "set a certain day, calling it Today," and quotes the Psalmist saying, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 4:7). Right now is your window of opportunity—your "Today"—and it is up to you to soften your heart, to believe, to obey God and His commandments through faith in Jesus Christ. That opportunity "still stands" for you! Learn from the mistakes of Israel, for their sins and consequences "occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did... These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (1 Corinthians 10:6,11).

Jesus Himself invites you to enter His "Sabbath-rest." Just before He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath day to pick some heads of grain, and before He healed a man on that same day, Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28,29). Submit yourself to Jesus, who "is Lord of the Sabbath" (12:8).

Start by praying to God through Jesus Christ. Thank Him for the knowledge of His truth, and for giving you an open invitation to enter His rest while it is still called "Today." Thank Him for the weekly Sabbath which beautifully typifies the plan He has set in motion from the creation of the world. Obey God. Keep His commandments—all of them. Love Him with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself (22:37-40).

Next, if you can, why not find a church near you to worship with this Sabbath? Scripture admonishes, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25). Since the Sabbath pictures fellowship with God, it is only logical that we should also fellowship with others in whom the Spirit of God lives and dwells. "And let us consider how we may

spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (verse 24).

If you would like to know where a Church of God International congregation is meeting near you, call, write, or e-mail us today and we'll be happy to direct you.

If you're already regularly attending church each Sabbath, don't let it become a sleepy, boring, predictable routine. Be prepared ahead of time and come with the right attitude and mind-set. It is good—especially on the Sabbath—to heed this exhortation: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (12:2,3).

Conclusion

The Sabbath, then, is not just "a day off" from work. This holy day points both to the salvation we can have in Jesus Christ now and to the ultimate salvation we will receive from Him at His Second Coming. Realizing this will help us make the transition from seeing Sabbath-keeping as simply an old "Jewish" law, or as a law that's severely limited in meaning, to experiencing the full Christological and redemptive significance that its observance pictures.

But whether you enter God's fellowship, and whether you fellowship with His children, is up to you—now that you know the "rest" of the story.

All Scripture quotations were taken from the New International Version.

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Some say he was a prophet, some say he was just a man. To others, he was just a myth and that he never really existed! Still, there are those who claim that God emptied himself and actually came down here in the person of Jesus! With all these speculations about Jesus going around, one has to wonder whether this raging controversy will ever come to an end. Find out for yourself the truth behind the man called Jesus and settle the question about his deity once and for all!

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