



SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES

DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

Many of the teachings and practices of traditional Christian churches are incompatible with biblically based doctrine. While the sincerity or motives of those who hold these beliefs is not questioned, it is essential this systematic theology plainly states the teachings on these traditional Christian subjects contrasted with what the Church of God International teaches as original biblical truth.

John 4:24; Ephesians 4:14; 1 Timothy 4:1; Jude 3; Revelation 12:9

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The basic approach of this work is to present the beliefs and doctrines of the Church of God International in a positive, non-hostile manner. We realize and acknowledge our biblical teachings are substantially different from other churches and religious groups. Therefore, we view it our responsibility to clearly point out where our doctrinal position differs from traditional Christian religious beliefs, customs and practices.

“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24). The emphasis on biblical truth has always been a hallmark of the Church of God International’s theology. Sincerity, though necessary, is not sufficient for complete fidelity to the teachings and directives of Jesus Christ and the entire New Testament. Truth—the original doctrinal truth of the Bible—is absolutely essential for those who will follow Jesus Christ. This is not to claim doctrinal perfection is necessary for either God’s collective Church or for the individual Christian. Indeed, this is unrealistic to demand, or expect, considering God

works through fallible human beings; such doctrinal perfection can only be achieved when Jesus Christ returns as King of kings and Lord of lords. Nonetheless, it is the responsibility of God’s Church to grow spiritually upwards with each generation to the unfolding reality of biblical truth through the guidance of God’s Spirit, intelligent study, and committed scholarship. Surely all commandments and traditions of men, as Jesus Christ Himself taught (Mk. 7:7–8), must be rejected and replaced by the commandments and teachings of God.

This Church maintains God’s Word—the Bible—is God’s written instruction book of worship, and it is the foundational authority on doctrine. Without maligning or casting aspersions on other Christian groups who sincerely and honestly believe these unsubstantiated doctrines are true, we recognize some traditional beliefs are incompatible with certain biblical teachings and, secondly, particular traditional practices are not showing the greatest respect to the Creator God who gave His life for us. Common sense dictates that one who wants to properly worship God must worship Him, as He Himself wants to be worshipped—He sets the requirements.

The beliefs of the Church of God International have been outlined already. Thus it is clear there are significant variations from other Christian churches. There is no need to repeat what has already been discussed except to summarize where we differ from certain “traditional” Christian beliefs. Some doctrinal beliefs are rejected because they directly contradict the stated biblical truth. Certain observances, on the other hand, are rejected because they do not contribute to a better understanding of God’s plan, or in certain cases, tend to lead away from it. For example, various Christian festivals are widely known to be non-Christian, as celebrations which heathen tribes brought *en masse* with them when they “converted.” Today, these celebrations have lost their original pagan connection and have been secularized so much that they lost all religious meaning whatsoever. On the other hand, there are

celebrations within the Bible that have generally been abandoned by Christianity. We deem it far more scriptural to continue the biblical festivals than taking up the more recent traditional holidays rooted in non-Christian religions.

Many are surprised to learn that commonly held Christian doctrines are in fact not “Christian” at all—that is, they are not the teachings of the New Testament. Some of these doctrines have been generated by sincere misunderstandings about what the Scriptures teach on a given topic. However, the tradition or doctrine of some churches will exist solely on the authority of that church denomination or organization, which indeed may openly acknowledge the doctrine is not supported by Scripture. Many such beliefs are based upon church traditions that evolved in the earlier years of the respective histories of their denominations and have consequently taken on the aura of authority. While the Church of God International does not negate the importance of proper church authority and tradition, it does maintain *such authority or tradition must in no way conflict with or negate the Scriptures*. Jesus supports this premise with words of strong disapproval of those in His time that allowed men’s commands to supersede God’s. “In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men” (Mk. 7:7).

The main danger in observing or believing certain “harmless” doctrines or customs is they tend to lead people away from the true plan of God. Thus while one can think he is obeying God, he is actually far from knowing, understanding, and doing what God would have him do. A man may be totally sincere but may be just as totally misled by teachings of men that are not derived from the teachings of the Bible. This can lead to unknowingly worshipping God “in vain.” The consequences of non-biblical doctrines are quite severe—even affecting one’s eternal life (Matt. 7:21–23)!

In this context, much stress is placed by God in the New Testament upon striving for, and maintaining purity of biblically accurate belief. Purity of belief may be defined as that belief which is in accordance and consistent with the teachings of Christ and the apostles (Gal. 1:8–9). We are also instructed to earnestly “contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). The thrust of this verse is we should strive for the same *body of beliefs* that Christ gave His early disciples

and apostles as well as the same attitude.

The doctrines explained in the following section are listed under the heading “Traditional Christian Doctrines,” because they represent commonly held teachings. We have a God-given responsibility to state clearly and honestly the biblical truth on these topics. The format is to first state the traditional Christian doctrine, which will be immediately followed by the contradicting and/or corresponding doctrine of the Church of God International.

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS

Doctrinal Statement on THE FALL OF MAN

The Augustinian view—that man fell from the height of glory/perfection to the lowest depths of depravity (with total inability to choose God’s way) is clearly unbiblical. Adam and Eve did not fall from any state of moral or spiritual perfection. Neither has the sin they committed been inherited by all mankind from birth (the so-called “original sin”). Rather, Adam and Eve were created morally and spiritually neutral, not yet having developed character or having done any evil. Using this free moral agency after being tempted by Satan, they chose to follow their own judgment rather than the revelation of God. Their descendents, with few exceptions, have followed the same path, thus depriving themselves of union with God.

Human beings are not born with an evil nature; they *become* sinful, to one degree or another, through allowing the evil forces that permeate the world to influence their thoughts and their choices in life.

It was actually Satan who had fallen from his position of glory and committed the “original sin.” It was Satan who then influenced Eve, Adam, and thereafter all mankind to follow the same path.

Genesis 1:31; Romans 6:16; Jeremiah 10:23; Ezekiel 18:20; John 15:4–5

Doctrinal Statement on THE IMMORTAL SOUL

Man neither is nor has an immortal soul. The traditional concept of an immortal soul, a spiritual entity or substance with fully independent existence and consciousness, which is so fundamental to var-

ious religious systems, is a myth. Man is a totally mortal, finite, living-breathing creature who has no consciousness, no awareness, and no existence after death. In this regard humans and animals are alike—the same death befalls them both. The one element that sets man apart from animals is not an “immortal soul” but a spiritual essence—a “spirit-in-man”—which transforms the human brain into the human mind. Man indeed has the *potential* for immortality, but this will occur only in the future at the resurrection from the dead when immortal life will be freely gifted from God through the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Ecclesiastes 3:19; Psalms 146:4; Job 14:14; Revelation 20:5

Doctrinal Statement on HEAVEN

The reward of the saved is not “going to heaven” at death. No conscious human beings have ever ascended into the heavens after death (except Jesus Christ). Man’s destiny is to enter God’s Family as His sons and daughters and to rule in His Kingdom, which will be set up on earth. The dead in Christ “rest” in their graves until the resurrection when God will bring them into His Family. Eventually, when the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21 comes, which also brings New Jerusalem to earth from God out of heaven, God the Father’s dwelling and throne will be forever with man. In this light, the question of “going to heaven” becomes meaningless, for heaven will then be on earth, which will be the final home of both God the Father and Christ the Son.

John 3:13, Revelation 5:10; 21:1–2, Matthew 5:5

Doctrinal Statement on HELL

The belief in an ever-burning hell, where sinners are tormented for eternity is not substantiated by the Bible. Such relentless anguish and eternal suffering is diametrically contrary to the character of a merciful, loving God. The punishment for rebellion against God will be a final destruction in the lake of fire, but this will produce death and nonexistence, not eternal torment. There is a clear difference between eternal *punishment* and eternal *punishing*. Except when used in a figurative sense, the Greek and Hebrew words translated “hell” in English versions of the Bible mean either the “grave” in which

corpses are buried, a place of restraint for fallen angels, or a *temporary* fire that burned rubbish near Jerusalem. Christ used the last as an analogy of the lake of fire, which will ultimately consume the wicked.

Matthew 10:28; Malachi 4:3; Revelation 20:15; Romans 6:23

Doctrinal Statement on the TRINITY

The concept of a closed or restricted Godhead composed of three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—is non-biblical. The Godhead is a Family, presently revealed as composed of only the Father and the Son, which will eventually include all those who have been given salvation through Christ. The Holy Spirit is not a distinct person or individual entity but the power, mind, and essence of God.

John 4:24; 10:30; Galatians 1:3; Revelation 11:15; 1 Corinthians 8:6

Doctrinal Statement on the GOSPEL

The gospel is more than just a message *about* Jesus Christ. The true gospel involves an understanding of the person of Christ, but its main thrust is the “good news” that Jesus Christ brought. This includes the witness and warning announcement that mankind is about to self-destruct, but God will save humanity from this certain self-destruction by setting up His Kingdom on earth through Jesus Christ’s return as King of kings. Also fundamental to the gospel that Jesus brought is the revelation of the way by which human beings may be part of that Kingdom and rule with Him—the revelation of how to obtain salvation. This process of salvation through Christ’s death and resurrection begins with obedience to Jesus’ command, “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:1; Galatians 1:6–8

Doctrinal Statement on the KINGDOM OF GOD

The Kingdom of God is not simply heaven, nor is it the Church on earth today, nor is it a spiritual kingdom within men’s hearts. The Kingdom of God is a world-ruling government (with laws, a king and rulers, territory, and subjects) to be set up on earth at Christ’s return and will continue thereafter, on out into eternity. The Kingdom of God is also the

Family of God into which man can be born again. The Family of God constitutes that Kingdom.

Isaiah 2:3–4; Daniel 2:44; Zechariah 14:9; Revelation 5:10

Doctrinal Statement on BORN AGAIN

The term “born again” (as used in John 3) is not synonymous with the immediate spiritual, mental, or emotional change (sometimes called “regeneration”) one undergoes by accepting Christ or being baptized. What Jesus explained to Nicodemus using the term “born again” refers to the actual change from a physical body (and existence) to a spiritual body (and existence) that occurs at the resurrection to eternal life and not before. To avoid confusion of the point Jesus was making to Nicodemus, the Church of God uses terms (other than “born again”) to describe a Christian being begotten with the Holy Spirit at baptism and the symbolic “new life” they lead.

John 3:1–21; 1 Corinthians 15:35–58, 1 Peter 1:22–25

Doctrinal Statement on SUNDAY

No biblical justification exists for observing the first day of the week; Sunday is nowhere sanctified in the Bible, nor is any special honor or significance ascribed to it. The seventh-day Sabbath was God’s holy day from Creation and was kept by the early apostolic Church, and is kept by God’s Church today. After all, to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy is to obey the Fourth of the Ten Commandments.

Exodus 20:8–11; Ezekiel 22:26; Mark 2:27–28; Luke 4:16; Acts 13:14–15, 42–44; Hebrews 4:9

Doctrinal Statement on CHRISTMAS

Christmas is neither Christ’s birthday nor a celebration Christians should observe. It is not mentioned in the Bible and in no way is an original Christian practice. As any encyclopedia will confirm, Christmas is an ancient pagan celebration, which predated Christianity, but was renamed and given new meaning when it was adopted into the professing Roman Universal (Catholic) Christian Churches. The Church of God movement recognizes references such as Jeremiah 10 are specifically about “idol worship” (rather than a Christmas

tree tradition), but the curious practices today of yule logs, wreaths, and decorating Christmas trees is foreign to Scripture and more akin to characteristics of ancient sun worship and tree worship via evergreens.

Deuteronomy 12:30–32; Jeremiah 10:2–5

Doctrinal Statement on EASTER

As any encyclopedia will note, Easter is an adaptation of an ancient, pagan, pre-Christian festival for celebration, which was adopted by traditional Christianity in place of the biblical Passover. Easter is nowhere mentioned in the Bible as a Christian holiday. Instead, the Passover should be properly observed on the correct date in accordance with Christ’s example and Paul’s instructions. The Church of God recognizes that references such as Ezekiel 8 are specifically about “sun worship” (rather than an Easter sunrise service tradition), but the curious practices today of eggs, bunnies, candles, and sunrise services are foreign to Scripture and more akin to characteristics of ancient sun worship and spring fertility festivals.

Deuteronomy 12:30–32; Jeremiah 10:2–5; 1 Corinthians 11:2, 23–26

Doctrinal Statement on THE RAPTURE

The doctrine of a secret rapture during which Christ will clandestinely return to catch away the saints from the earth, protecting them from the great tribulation, is not biblical. It is neither taught nor mentioned in the New Testament. Christ will indeed come back to this earth, but it will be only once, with power and full glory, and will be totally visible to all human beings. This will occur at the final trumpet blast, concomitant with the first resurrection, which is after the great tribulation, and just after the seventh and last plague.

Luke 21:25–28; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17; Revelation 1:7; Zechariah 14:4

Doctrinal Statement on “THE LORD’S PRAYER”

Repetitious recitations of the Lord’s Prayer are not practiced as a Christian custom. Jesus admonished His disciples not to repeat ritualistic prayers over and over again to God, but rather pray from a fully active mind and heart. His sample prayer in

Matthew 6:9–15 was given as an outline for prayer, showing His disciples how to pray and what to pray for and about. It's a template and is not intended to be repeated repetitiously like some superstitious mantra.

Matthew 6:9–15; John 11:41–43; John 17

Doctrinal Statement on PREDESTINATION

God has *not* predetermined, nor can He even know in advance, whether or not a person will yield himself to God, strive for perfection, and succeed in entering into His Kingdom. God has predestined that He will give human beings the opportunity to conform to the image of His Son if they decide to do so. God has also predestined that He would choose a certain group in this end time to fulfill His commission and qualify for His Kingdom now. Thus predestination refers solely to the *time* of one's calling, when God decides to open a person's mind to His truth, thereby giving him an opportunity for salvation.

Romans 8:28–30; 10:1; Ephesians 1:3–11; Hebrews 6:4–6

Doctrinal Statement on SPEAKING IN TONGUES

The biblical occurrences of “speaking in tongues” are neither the phenomenon often seen in charismatic circles nor a sign by which one judges whether God has begotten a person by His Holy Spirit. In complete contrast to the unintelligible verbal utterances of certain groups, for one to biblically “speak in tongues” means God has supernaturally given the gift of speaking in an actual foreign language to that person as a sign.

Mark 16:17; Acts 2:7–11; 1 Corinthians 12:28, 30

Doctrinal on LAW AND GRACE

To be “under grace” does not mean a person may disregard or disobey God's law by assuming Christ has “fulfilled” the law for him or that Christ must always forgive him. Grace is “favor” from God, unmerited pardon for sins that are past, granted because of His mercy and forgiveness. Grace in no way gives one license to disobey God. Man must keep God's commandments to be a true Christian. Salvation cannot be earned. It is a free gift that requires law (which defines sin), grace (which is the

forgiveness of sin), and faith in God. Good works are a consequence of that living faith.

Ephesians 2:8; Romans 6:1–2; Matthew 5:8

Doctrinal Statement on INFANT BAPTISM

The practice of infant baptism is not supported by biblical principle. Since persons are not born with “original sin” there is no need for them to be baptized in childhood. For one to be truly ready for the baptism described in the New Testament, one must be sufficiently mature to understand the Bible, believe in Jesus Christ, and be capable of real repentance.

Luke 14:26–33; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:35–39; Acts 16:30–34

Doctrinal Statement on BAPTISM

The traditional Christian practices of baptism by any method other than immersion—such as sprinkling, pouring, etc.—is not in accord with the teachings of the New Testament, indeed the symbolism likening baptism to the death of the “old” man, being buried with Christ, can be fully expressed only by total immersion in water.

Romans 6:3–4; John 3:23; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:38–39

Doctrinal Statement on PENANCE

God does not require penance, an imposed system of physical works, undertaken as punishment in token of penitence for sin. God totally forgives the sinner upon true repentance and acceptance of Christ's sacrifice as full payment for the penalty of sin. True repentance is toward God alone, and He demands no external manifestation before men. To repent is to reform both disposition (qualities of one's mind and character) and behavior. Scripture is also clear that repentance to God is not complete until a sinner does all he or she can to make things right with those impacted.

Psalms 51:16–17; 103:11–13; 1 John 1:9

Doctrinal Statement on ETERNAL SECURITY

The belief that a person, once converted, can never lose out on salvation is biblically unfounded. God wants us to grow in grace, knowledge, and character, and He gives us the free moral agency necessary. Christians are thereby not saved in the

ultimate sense until they have been finally born into God's Kingdom at the resurrection. While still living, Christians can have confidence and assurance of their salvation, with the understanding they can choose to lose their salvation by willfully rejecting God's way. Only at the resurrection or at death (whichever comes first), is the true Christian eternally secure.

1 Corinthians 9:24–27; Hebrews 6:4–6; 10:26–27

Doctrinal Statement on UNIVERSALISM

It is possible for human beings to reject God's truth, salvation, and thus be denied entry into God's Kingdom. The ultimate reconciliation of *all* humans and creatures to God is not taught in the Bible. If it were impossible to cast aside and renounce God, this would destroy the free moral agency crucially essential for building the character of God. God's will is that all men come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. However, all will not choose to follow God and be granted salvation, though biblical indications are that the vast majority will joyously do so. Those who remain unrepentant will be consumed in the lake of fire.

Ezekiel 33:11; Matthew 13:49–50; Revelation 20:15; 21:8

Doctrinal Statement on THE CHURCH

A church is not, except in extended usage, a building or an edifice. It is rather the people who comprise the congregation, the collective "body of Christ," the group of called out believing Christians in whom God's Holy Spirit dwells. It can be applied to Christians as a whole or to an individual congregation.

2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13; 1 Timothy 3:15

Doctrinal Statement on THE CROSS

The use of crosses, crucifixes, or the "sign of the cross" in prayer or worship is non-biblical and non-efficacious in a Christian's relationship with God and Christ. The image of a cross has no intrinsic spiritual value and apparently originated in non-Christian religions; for these reasons it is avoided. God instructs His people to worship Him without such external devices. Furthermore, a case can be made that He was crucified on a stake, tree, or pole

(Greek: *stauros*), not a *crux*, meaning cross, which was used in the Latin Vulgate to describe the instrument used to crucify Christ. The cross was an ancient Chaldean pagan symbol.

Exodus 20:4–6; Leviticus 26:1; John 4:24; Acts 5:30

Doctrinal Statement on PICTURES OF JESUS

We do not know what Jesus looked like, and we should not make worshipful use of His pictures if we did. The pictures most often purporting to represent His face are mythical, inaccurate, and unbiblical, and are the product of mere human imagination. The use of any picture as a religious crutch breaks the spirit of the second commandment.

Exodus 20:4–6; Isaiah 53:2; John 8:59

Doctrinal Statement on RELIGIOUS MEDALS/STATUES

For man to make, venerate or use as reminders in worship such things as medals, statues, or images of "God" is forbidden by the second commandment. Man has direct access to God through Christ and needs no other intercessor or aid—no "holy" object or "holy" person—in personal worship.

Exodus 20:4–6; 2 Kings 17:15; Exodus 32:5–6, 20

Doctrinal Statement on MINISTERIAL/RELIGIOUS TITLES

The use of religious titles that rightfully belong only to God, such as "Reverend" or "Father," are avoided for ministers. Respect for a person's office does not depend upon what title he uses. The Bible says, "Holy and Reverend is His [God's] name," not the name of any man.

Matthew 23:6–10; Psalms 111:9; Proverbs 22:1

Doctrinal Statement on FAITH HEALING

The attempt to promote faith healing as a public spectacle in a carnival-like atmosphere is contrary to both the example and intent of Scripture. Christ and the apostles healed as a witness to their preaching of the gospel, but today miraculous healings usually take place in a private and personal way.

James 4:15; 5:14–15; Luke 8:52–56; 2 Kings 5:10–14

**Doctrinal Statement on
ABSTINENCE/ASCETICISM**

The ascetic way of life is not taught as the biblical ideal. The total avoidance of certain physical pleasures such as drinking alcoholic beverages or having sexual relations within marriage is not biblically commanded. (Drinking alcohol *in excess* or participating in sexual behavior *outside* of marriage is strictly and forcibly condemned.) The Bible does allow, and even encourages, the proper moderate use of the many physical pleasures of life, which God created for man's enjoyment. Scripture also shows that a tool such as fasting can be used, not because God likes to see "suffering," but because it

can help promote a humble attitude in us, to see how great God is, and how comparatively weak and dependent mankind is, on simple things like food. This should also help us to recognize and appreciate the plan of salvation God is offering that affords us eternal life as embodied spirit beings in His Kingdom.

Colossians 2:20–23; 1 Timothy 4:1–3; Isaiah 58:1–11

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