

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD
SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

**ORGANIZATION
AND
PURPOSE**

NOTE ABOUT THIS STILL INCOMPLETE FIRST DRAFT

At this time, only five of the over thirty main topics included in the Systematic Theology Project are complete doctrinal expositions (although still preliminary)—Law of God, Sabbath, Annual Holy Days, Tithing and Giving, and Healing. The remainder of the topics are covered by brief overviews in some cases or by "extended" overviews in other cases. All overviews will be upgraded to full expositions of the approximate length and thoroughness of the other five within the next 24 months or so. It should be emphasized that all of the statements—whether overview, extended overview or full exposition—are first drafts and, as such, will be subjected to continual analysis and revision.

NOTE ABOUT THE BIBLICAL TRANSLATION

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical scriptures are quoted from either the Revised Standard Version or the King James Version.

ORGANIZATION AND PURPOSE

This systematic theology is being produced by the Worldwide Church of God to reflect its doctrines, beliefs, practices and traditions. The development of the project is the response to a need sensed by the leadership of the Church. The need was for an up-to-date and accurate statement of our official doctrinal positions and understandings, which would provide a formal record and serve as a communications vehicle both within and without the Church.

Within the Church, the systematic theology will establish a coherent and consistent reference for the ministry and for the lay membership. As such, it will promote unity among the ministry and further understanding among the members. As a formal record of the Church's beliefs and teachings, the systematic theology will provide an official source of public information about the doctrines of the Worldwide Church of God.

The Bible alone is God's written revelation to man. This systematic theology is simply an attempt to explain our comprehension of God's Word as believed, taught, expounded and applied by the Church. It is written by men for men— and is consequently not to be put on a par with God's Holy Word. The systematic theology is not to replace the Bible nor to supersede or overshadow it. The point of view is that of looking up toward, and not down upon, God's Word. Although we are building a superstructure, the Bible will always remain the foundation. The readership of this theology is cautioned not to lose this perspective.

A specific approach is followed in order to make this systematic theology applicable and relevant to ourselves and to others. A document intended to fulfill the goals of being accurate, readable, unifying and informative must, of course, be written in a manner that can accomplish these goals. This Systematic Theology Project is therefore somewhat different from other systematic theologies whose goals are different from ours. ' While other projects may be aimed at scholars or theologians exclusively, this work is to be used as a practical working tool for the field ministry of the Worldwide Church of God. As such, there will be material—for example, on Christian living and Church organization—that is not

ordinarily found in academic systematic theologies. Some of these subjects could be classified as administrative practices or Church traditions rather than doctrines and beliefs. The point is that everything included is given as guidelines for the ministry. Therefore, we are under no illusion that this systematic theology is like any others. It is unique and intentionally so.

While the Worldwide Church of God traces its roots to the New Testament Church, our recent history dates from the calling of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong in the late 1920's and to his commission by God in the early 1930's to preach the gospel to the world as a witness. As the Pastor General of the Church, he has set the example of approaching doctrine as a search for truth so that one might know and obey God. He also has long recognized that it is ultimately through God's Spirit that we can fully comprehend the Bible. For the years since Mr. Armstrong's calling until now, the written record of our beliefs has taken the form of booklets or articles on individual topics written as we grew in knowledge, understanding and insight. But as the Church developed into a substantial institution, Mr. Garner Ted Armstrong, Executive Vice-President of the Church, recognized the need for a more organized, thorough systematic presentation of the Church's doctrines and beliefs, and thus commissioned the present Project.

Now, with the initial establishment of this more formalized systematic theology, certain fundamental difficulties arise as by-products of the process. First is simply the "look" of apparent perfection and permanence. Only the Bible itself claims total inspiration, and any systematic theology must be at least somewhat arbitrary and artificial. The Bible is God's Word, presenting with great literary scope and historical sweep the record of God's instructions to man and man's relationship with God. As such, the reality of biblical truth is coherent and integrated. Biblical "doctrines" are not formally categorized into topics, subtopics and sub-subtopics. But this is what must be done in any systematic theology. We have obviously tried to formulate the overall organization to best represent the current teachings of the Worldwide Church of God. Yet, since this doctrinal organization, as with any doctrinal organization, must divide the truth of God into independent subjects, the full impact of the tight interrelationships and inter-dependencies among all doctrines must of necessity be somewhat sacrificed. Furthermore, we fully recognize the numerous

ways in which this systematic theology could have been organized. We have no illusion that what is hereby presented is perfect or cannot be improved, but we intend to accurately reflect the contemporary teachings of the Church.

The Church recognizes "doctrine" as simply being the basic tenets or teachings of the Bible and the Church. The importance of understanding true doctrine is as vital as understanding God's master plan itself—since doctrine in reality is only this same master plan broken down into its component parts. The challenge of any systematic theology is to take these various parts and organize them in a clear and logical fashion.

The paradox of any systematic theology (as discussed in the section on the Bible) is that no one doctrine can be understood apart from all the other doctrines, and it is impossible to comprehend all the doctrines without understanding each individual one. The interrelationships and interdependencies among all the biblical teachings are extremely strong. The structural associations and interactions among the numerous doctrines are not therefore limited to a simple two-dimensional linear progression. Rather, what we are confronted with is a multi-dimensional structure with the number of dimensions just about equaling the number of doctrines. This means that to explain fully almost any of the biblical doctrines, one would have to explain most of the others.

How then do we start? How can we best begin to systematize biblical theology? Our approach has been first to discern the appropriate doctrinal subjects necessary to most efficiently include the full body of the Church's biblical teachings, and then proceed to organize them into a logical and consistent structure. We developed seven general categories and over thirty major doctrinal topics for this preliminary draft. Categories and topics were chosen and organized to best reflect a logical pattern of biblical order and to emphasize them as taught and practiced by the Worldwide Church of God.

1. PRIMARY DOCTRINES; God, Bible, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, Mankind, Angelic Realm;
2. SALVATION; Salvation, Faith, Repentance, Baptisms, Laying on of Hands;

3. KINGDOM OF GOD: Kingdom of God, Gospel, Prophecy, Resurrections, Judgment;

4. LAW OF GOD: Law of God, Biblical Covenants, Ten Commandments, Sabbath, Annual Holy Days, Tithing and Giving, Sin;

5. THE CHRISTIAN: The Christian, The Christian Relationship with God, The Christian Relationship with Fellow Man, The Christian Family, Healing;

6. THE CHURCH OF GOD: The Church of God, Ministry of the Church, Fellowship of the Brethren;

7. TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES: Statements on almost thirty traditional doctrines, such as immortal soul, heaven, hell, trinity, Sunday, Christmas, Easter, Rapture etc., presenting the theological viewpoint of the Worldwide Church of God.

Next, each doctrinal subject was thoroughly explored from both biblical and Church perspectives to determine the scope of subtopics and concepts that should be covered. These were then submitted to dozens of ministers for evaluation. The actual writing of the papers developed from a carefully constructed outline of concept flow and was directed to emphasize a practical product. Each paper was written to be readable and useful as well as biblically accurate and logical. The papers were then submitted to other ministers and scholars of the Church for critique, and each paper passed through many edits. As an explanation rather than as a defense, each doctrinal paper expresses our beliefs honestly (and hopefully clearly) in a straightforward manner. This systematic theology is thereby not intended as a challenge or rebuttal to others' beliefs.

Each particular doctrinal paper contains first a "Doctrinal Statement" (a succinct and direct declaration of the essence of what we believe on the topic) , followed by a "Doctrinal Overview" (an expanded statement summarizing the basic tenets of the doctrine), and finally a "Doctrinal Exposition" (a full, detailed explanation of the subject).

One objective this project strives to fulfill is to project the right perspective by presenting each doctrine in its proper biblical context and appropriate relationship to other doctrines. We try to emphasize what is of clear

biblical importance. It is all too easy to focus on a relatively minor point of doctrine to the apparent exclusion of more fundamental topics. This usually happens because one has questions he feels need immediate resolution; at other times it is because one has a particular interest in the topic. Sometimes points of doctrine generate focus or interest in inverse proportion to how much the Bible discusses them; this is quite understandable, because the obscure points are, by their very nature, more intellectually stimulating and intriguing than the obvious and easily proved fundamentals of the faith. However, no matter what the reasons, the pitfall of doctrinal myopia is to lose the vision of the "big picture" of God's master plan. Once one has lost this overview, he has lost his spiritual way.

The best way to keep our doctrinal focus sharp and clear is to stay finely tuned to the central figure of the entire Bible: Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is both the focal point and the "big picture" of the entire Bible—He is the overview of both testaments. The Old Testament is the story of His creation and government (Col. 1:16), His dealings with Israel (1 Cor. 10:4) and His laws; it also records His ancestry and the detailed prophecies of His first and second comings. The New Testament is the story of His life and message, the magnification of His laws, the beginning of His Church and the announcement of His coming Kingdom. If Christ did not exist, there would be no Bible—there would be no point to it. Jesus Christ is the Word of God; and since the Bible is God's written word, it is, in a very real sense, the embodiment of Jesus Christ in verbal representation on the printed page.

In accordance with the focal point and overview of the Bible, this systematic theology stresses Jesus Christ—past, present and future. It tells of His life, His works, His message, His "good news," His teachings, His instructions, His laws, His way of life, His admonitions, His corrections, His rebukes, His love, His mercy, His forgiveness, His people, His friends, His covenants, His Church, His Kingdom, His promises, and His salvation. The focus is on Jesus Christ, as these statements represent His doctrines which we have attempted to present in an organized and systematic manner. No one keeping close to the trunk of this tree will ever get caught out on a limb. No one following the foundational doctrines of Jesus Christ will ever suffer doctrinal tunnel vision and the resultant spiritual blindness that such tunnel vision can cause.

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong has always emphasized the fundamental "trunk of the tree" doctrines of the Church. These deal with two essential elements: 1) God's purpose for human existence; and 2) the plan by which He will accomplish that purpose. Together they answer the question which has been the title of one of Mr. Armstrong's primary booklets, Why Were You Born?

God's purpose for mankind offers the most incredible possible potential that can be imagined. Indeed, it stretches the imagination beyond its limit, for God states that every human being can eventually be born into God's own Family, with God Himself as his or her real Father. Man was created to actually become God, just as God Himself is God, with the same qualities of existence such as immortality and eternal life. Man was designed to become a full member of the God Family, just as our elder brother, Jesus Christ is God and part of that Family. This is mankind's ineffably awesome potential—a spectacular destiny which will eventually include the entire universe as part of our inheritance.

God's plan for accomplishing this purpose for mankind is equally breath-taking. God will make His truth known to all human beings from all time and every place and give to each of them individually a full opportunity for salvation. God is not willing that any should perish and has structured a plan which will make available to all people the full knowledge of His purpose and way (though what they do with this knowledge will be a product of their independent minds to which God has given free moral agency).

This, then, is the essential foundation of biblical doctrine as believed and taught by the Worldwide Church of God—that all mankind, every human being who has ever lived, will eventually have the opportunity to become born of God into the Family of God, to literally become God. Around this fundamental concept every other biblical doctrine must revolve and relate.

Owing to the obvious interdependence of biblical doctrines, not everything to be said on any particular subject can often be presented in the same place or even in the same paper. The reader is requested to keep this in mind before making hasty evaluations or jumping to quick conclusions. For example, the complex discussion of "law and grace" must be

woven through many of the doctrinal statements. This has been an especially confusing subject for those who have erroneously claimed that the Worldwide Church of God teaches that salvation can be earned through obedience to the law. In order for the reader to grasp the full and proper biblical understanding of the many-faceted interrelationships between law and grace, several of the following doctrinal statements, overviews and expositions need to be read in parallel (beginning with Law of God and Salvation, then including Biblical Covenants, Sabbath, Ten Commandments, "Law or Grace" in Traditional Christian Doctrines, and finally also involving particularly relevant aspects of other papers, such as the historical comparison between the Worldwide Church of God and the early New Testament Church in The Church of God).

All doctrinal statements need to be read in their entirety. By searching through the systematic theology in general or any one statement in particular for the answer to an intriguing or needle some problem one runs the risk of short-circuiting himself. To accurately comprehend the specific subject of one's current interest, the reader is advised to at least read through that whole doctrinal statement to appreciate the full scope of the doctrine under consideration, as well as to skim through any related statements. (For example, many of the more general—but most powerful—reasons how we can know that the early New Testament Church observed God's Feast days are not presented in the statement on Annual Holy Days, but are in Law of God, Biblical Covenants and especially Sabbath.)

The systematic theology project is the product of numerous ministers and scholars of the Worldwide Church of God. It is only through this substantial resource of knowledge and experience that we can hope to attain a reflection of God's understanding and wisdom. Yet the systematic theology must not be cemented in stone. It will need continual revision as God guides the Church in further understanding of His Word.

What is herein presented is therefore still in preliminary form. It must continue to grow in both scope and quality. But it cannot grow without constant constructive input from the ministry. Ministers should consider it their responsibility to help refine the Systematic Theology Project, contributing to it in the same spirit with which it was prepared. Hence, we accept, appreciate and welcome—indeed solicit—all information which serves to enhance and improve this effort.

Such input may take the form of short or long edits, comments, ideas, additions, deletions, critiques, scriptural references, and/or new information and research. The proper procedure for giving input is to present your contribution in as clear a manner as possible and send it to the Systematic Theology Project at Church Headquarters in Pasadena, California, U.S.A., in care of Dr. Robert Kuhn. All information will be read and considered, and if accurate, appropriate and approved, it will be incorporated.

Input from the general membership of the Church is also welcome, but should be submitted through the local pastor. The sheer volume of such material could overwhelm the headquarters staff unless it is deemed by the local pastor to have merit. No doctrinal paper can be considered unless the author's pastor has studied the paper and then submitted it with his appropriate annotations, edits, or comments.

We welcome all input and do plan to begin working on a second edition just as soon as this first edition is finished. Yet the Systematic Theology of the Worldwide Church of God will never be finalized and complete, as we continue to follow Peter's admonition to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

On the other hand, this recognition of need for refinement and the invitation for criticism should not be misinterpreted. It does not mean that the doctrinal statements, overviews and expositions included here can be followed or ignored by ministers and members as they see fit. While these statements of current teachings and practices contain very little that is "new" as such, in some cases they do include additional supportive information and commentary, or contain original analyses, syntheses and approaches, or give fresh insight and understanding—all of which reflect positively in generating refined comprehension of, and continued confidence in, the fundamental doctrinal convictions of the Church. As such, these papers supersede individual opinions; out-of-print publications, articles, and booklets; and past teachings and earlier understandings. As far as the papers themselves make possible, they should be used for doctrinal understanding and exposition.

The process of editing has included approval by the necessary Church leaders and officers. These papers are therefore authoritative in their present form (until upgraded and/or revised) and are to be followed as guides in teaching, preaching, and practice by the ministry and Church membership.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

SYSTEMATIC THIOLOGY PROJECT

GOD

Doctrinal Statement

God is the eternal, omnipresent, all-powerful, supreme Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe. God is *one*, composed of spirit and comprising a Family revealed as presently consisting of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. God is a loving, kind, merciful Being who wants to share His magnificent existence by reproducing Himself through man.

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The most fundamental need facing mankind is to recognize the existence of God and to understand His character, personality and master plan. Man will continue to flounder without real knowledge of the purpose of life until he gains an accurate and clear picture of his Creator.

The question of whether God's existence can be proved is one that has troubled mankind throughout millennia, stirring heated debate with arguments on both sides. Unfortunately, the form most of these debates have taken is for one person to try to forcibly "prove" God's existence to another by attempting to formulate arguments or logic so airtight as to exclude any other possibility. This approach does not work. No argument, no matter how carefully thought out or logically constructed, can absolutely "prove" God's existence to one who will grasp at virtually any other unlikely explanation or remote possibility. No person can make another person believe in God I

Nevertheless, God's existence can be totally proved to oneself. One who has individually and personally experienced the biblical miracle of conversion, or who has received miraculous answers to his prayers, has truly and irrefutably proved God's existence to himself and cannot be shaken from this proof by any argument, whether theological or philosophical, as long as he stays in this contact with God.

God's existence is also powerfully demonstrated by the creation. The reality of the material universe, the existence of life and the interdependence and sustenance of the laws governing this matter respectively require a Creator, a Life-Giver and a Sustainer. Thus David said: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). Likewise, Paul records that "the invisible things of him /God/ from /looking up at/ the creation . . . are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).

The Bible reveals that the one God is a Family composed of two members—the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ. John's gospel states that these two have dwelt together from eternity and that they share power, glory and majesty, although Christ is second in authority. From the biblical revelation we infer that God resembles man in certain aspects but is composed of spirit instead of flesh (Jn. 4:24), radiating spiritual energy and power. The few references to God's "appearance" emphasize His incredible brilliance (Rev. 1:14-16; Dan. 7:9-10).

God is the total embodiment of love; He is the originator of law and the giver of every good and perfect gift. His many titles and names (Creator, Counselor, Healer, Self-Existent One, Father, Almighty, etc.) reveal His special qualities of character and personality. Yet it is God's mercy and compassion that are paramount in giving full hope and confidence to fallible human beings who are sinners all.

Perhaps the most outstanding single characteristic of God is His total, unselfish love. This one quality is so much a part of God's entire makeup that He is in actuality its total personification and hence "is[^] love" (1 Jn. 4:8). God has demonstrated His love for us in many ways: through the sacrifice of His son (Jn. 3:16), by forgiving our sins, by strengthening our will and determination in the face of trials and in countless other ways. But perhaps the single greatest expression of God's love is that He has devised a plan to share Himself by reproducing Himself through man.

This master plan is indeed the greatest imaginable truth and the very reason why the entire universe was created. All human beings from all times shall have a full opportunity to become members of God's Family. Mankind has been created in God's image (Gen. 1:26) and put on earth to reject evil and thereby to build character so that each human being can be spiritually born into God's Kingdom and Family. Thus God's Family of two revealed persons shall grow to billions, and God's greatness shall be multiplied by as many times as the incredible number of sons God shall add to His family.

The God of the Bible is both cosmic and personal. He is the Creator of the universe and at the same time is concerned for each human being. He sustains galaxies and controls the full scope of human history at the same time

as he focuses His intense concern on each man, woman and child who seeks Him. God is involved with the whole of mankind: in the rise and fall of governments, in the sweep of generations, in the ultimate direction of human society. Yet this same Being is intimately involved in the personal lives of human beings of every social stratum, race and intellect. God is merciful to sinners; He is compassionate and deeply desires that we attain the greatest possible happiness and success.

For now, God rules the spiritual and material universe from His throne in heaven, although His mind and Spirit reach everywhere. Beside Him sits His Son, Jesus Christ, and the two of them, surrounded and aided by myriads of angels of differing ranks and authority, direct the working out of their master plan. Eventually, God's throne will be moved to the "new earth" of Revelation 21 from where He and His billions of sons will rule His Kingdom and the unfathomable vastness of the infinite universe for all eternity.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

BIBLE

Doctrinal Statement

The Bible is the divinely inspired word of God, the repository of His plan of salvation and the record of His participation in history. The Bible is God's revelation of knowledge that man cannot discover for himself. It is the foundation of knowledge and the guidebook to life. The Old and New Testaments comprise God's written Word which forms the basis of Christianity as taught by the Church and as practiced by the individual Christian.

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Bible is God's written revelation to mankind. It contains God's instructions to man and the record of God's interaction with mankind. The Bible provides the answers to mankind's fundamental questions of life. It is the revelation of an omniscient, omnipotent and loving God; it reveals who God is, and what His plan and purpose for human beings is.

The Bible exists to provide man with essential knowledge which he could not learn apart from divine revelation. Thus, the Bible includes the fundamental principles of how man should live, how he should govern his own life to generate success and happiness, and how to work with his fellow man to achieve peace and harmony. But at its foundational core, the Bible provides the indispensable knowledge of how man may gain salvation and eternal life, knowledge which he is incapable of discovering for himself (1 Cor. 2:7-11). As the repository of this vital information, the Bible is God's basic handbook for mankind.

The Worldwide Church of God believes the Bible to be divinely inspired (2 Tim. 3:16), the revelation of the missing dimension in man's knowledge by the Supreme Authority of the universe. The Church regards the Holy Bible as the receptacle of God's essential theological knowledge, basic, accurate, and complete in its original form. Of course, there are no original manuscripts extant today. Few are from close to the time of authorship and even age does not always assure accuracy and fidelity. Whatever shortcomings therefore may be present in contemporary biblical manuscripts—because human instruments were writers and copyists, because some translators lacked knowledge of the original languages, or because of the complexities and vagaries implicit in the transmission of the various texts—all together have not substantially concealed the intent nor overshadowed, the direct inspiration of the basic biblical message as we have it today.

What part did God allow human fallibility to play in the transmission of the many original biblical texts? This is a real question considering the fact, for example, that there are three Hebrew versions for parts of the Old Testament,

all of which are pre-Christian in origin and which New Testament writers used and quoted as recent research has shown. Furthermore, the analysis of large numbers of ancient New Testament texts with their numerous textual variations have not yielded obvious or conclusive results for many scriptures, though the most meticulous and highly sophisticated techniques have been employed.

Will future discoveries, investigation and scholarship generate yet new questions or uncertainties about certain passages? It doesn't matter, because the Bible's primary objectives have never been, and can never be, perverted or corrupted. The sum total of all textual variations do not alter the essential communicative function of the Bible. Its fundamental intent is fully maintained: all the basic doctrines of God's Church, to a greater or lesser degree, are discernible from any textual version or translation of the Bible.

The Church accepts the books of the Old Testament as found in the canon of the Hebrew Bible and the books of the New Testament as found in the canon of the Greek New Testament. These have been sometimes called the "Protestant canon." This same context has been accepted for most of Christianity for 1500 years. (The Apocryphal books are thus rejected as non canonical.) The Church has accepted this canon largely on the basis of internal biblical evidence (such as Lk. 24:44, etc.), informed faith and tradition. (Jesus' reference to "the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms" [ox writings/ gives credence to ordering the Old Testament to end with II Chronicles ^as in the "Jewish Bible" instead of Malachi /as in the "Christian Bible"

Essential to the teaching of the Church is the fact that the Bible can be proved to be the written Word of God. The foremost proof that God's Word is precisely what it claims to be is that it works in one's life. The proof of obedience is the Bible's best stamp of divine authorship. Adherence to its principles, laws and concepts bring about success and happiness in one's own life, which is ultimately the most critical ratification of its divine inspiration. Only one who sincerely seeks to apply the biblical way to his own life will eventually learn that the practical instructions, timeless wisdom, spiritual depth and living laws come from a supreme Being, and not merely from fallible, mortal men. Once a person has accepted the concept of the Bible containing the inspired word of God" he is able, by appreciating

the intricate yet harmonious interaction of all parts of the Bible, to conclude in faith that the whole Bible, all scripture, is precisely what it claims to be--"inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). The Christian will also conclude that even those parts of the Bible which are by their very nature unable to be "proven" in a mathematical or scientific sense (e.g., as yet unfulfilled prophecies or historical points which are unable to be substantiated by secular references) are indeed part of the Bible, form part of the vehicle of its message, and are accurate in their proper context. In this logical "jump"--this leap across undocumented gaps--one cannot discount the importance of faith.

The Church, of course, acknowledges that the Bible does not claim to be a textbook of comprehensive world history, science and technology, medicine or any other non-theological discipline. Nonetheless, the Bible is the word of God, and as such, is the foundation of all knowledge, as well as being the storehouse of salvation.

Fulfilled prophecy is likewise an important aspect of God's Holy Word. Only God can predict and bring to pass events of the future (Is. 41:21-24). Only the Creator God could predict the name and actions of Cyrus long before his birth (Is. 44-45). Only He could tell the intricate and accurate events outlined in Daniel 11 or foretell in detail about the coming of His Son as Savior of the world (Is. 9:53, and many other scriptures). While faith plays a role in assessing the significance of already fulfilled prophecy in proving the Bible, there can be absolutely no doubt regarding as yet unfulfilled prophecy. When the complex sequence of events culminating in the triumphant return of Jesus Christ to earth occurs, there will be no question whatsoever that the God who foretold it all in biblical prophecy far ahead of time is the same Being who inspired the entirety of the Bible.

The Bible alone claims absolute preeminence over all other books esteemed by mankind and challenges all mankind by its claims of purity (Ps. 12:6; Prov. 30:5), scope and completeness (Rev. 22:18-19). The challenges of the God of the Bible (Is. 41:21-23) are powerful and direct. Its prophecies for the future return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the world-ruling Kingdom of God are straightforward and unmistakable.

In addition to being the written record of the essential theological knowledge for mankind, the Bible is also great literature, with many literary forms and devices—poetry, prose, allegory, epic, parable, history, even humor. It is often open and frank, and yet at other times it is discreet and obscure. The Bible exposes the weaknesses of its heroes, but calls them the friends of God. It shows the glory and power of the Creator through His many miracles but it shows Him to be intimately concerned with the smallest details of human lives. It holds out the answers to the riddles of life, yet hides enough of God's nature and the universe to tantalize us and draw us further along in a profound growth process.

We see through the pages of the Bible the lessons of human experience. We read of men and women like us, those who share problems common to all—with the same pulls and passions, hopes and dreams, fears and frustrations. The Bible not only shows the common heritage of human nature, but enables us to understand the process whereby we may overcome the destructive elements within us and attain our God-given potential.

The Bible is many books yet one, a superlative example of *e pluribus unum* ("one composed of many"). This remarkable unity of design is one of the unique characteristics of the Bible. Another is its internal consistency in its diversity, combining to form a coherent composite. The mark of one Author, for those who have eyes to see, is startlingly apparent.

The authors of the various biblical books came from differing backgrounds, lived in disparate environments and were diverse in their personalities, education and professions. They wrote in different styles, from different standpoints, to different audiences and at different times. Yet the continuing themes God inspired are the same. God used all their various and contrasting perspectives to shape and to emphasize the same basic truth. From Genesis to Revelation we read of the same God, the same massive plan being unfolded and developed, with each book augmenting, supporting and complementing that which has gone before. This unitary focus is due to the God who initiated, organized and inspired the entire Holy Scriptures. Although many different men played their part as they were moved by His Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20), the Bible is in reality God's Word and not man's.

This is the only factor which could explain the uniqueness and remarkable coherence of the Bible. Dozens of writers spanning a period of over 1500 years from Moses to John of such dissimilar traits and characteristics could never have achieved that unity as a result of human effort alone. Yet the unity is there, not as the product of numerous human minds, but of one Mind—the Mind of God—interacting with, and directing, the grand sweep of biblical authors in many unlikely forms, but always in such a way that their own personal emotions, feelings, personality and individual writing styles were employed. God inspired the message, but it was conveyed through language and vocabulary that was peculiar and natural to each man. The Bible is thus a human vehicle through which God has chosen to convey His revelation to mankind.

The Bible and the physical universe were designed in a similar fashion: they both work as the products of enormously complex interactions resulting in a wondrously purposeful product. The similarity between the Bible and the universe is, of course, to be expected since the same Creator designed them both. The Bible is thus not a simplistic, deterministic catechism of childish declarative statements. Rather it is a living record of complex interactions, actions and reactions, stimuli and responses, mistakes and miracles, successes and failures.

There is a paradox in true biblical understanding. In order to properly understand any specific biblical doctrine, it is first necessary to comprehend the entirety of all biblical doctrines; and, of course, it is impossible to comprehend the entirety of all biblical doctrines until one understands all the specific biblical doctrines separately. Seldom can one biblical teaching be fully understood in isolation. There is an essential interdependence between nearly all biblical doctrines. Each must be understood in light of all the others. The reason for this is the inherent unity of the biblical focus and the coherent thread of its message. Proper biblical understanding must be achieved by visualizing and comprehending the full sweeping scope of its message that only the whole Bible can project.

In this regard, the Bible functions more like a living brain than a computer. In a computer, each "bit" of data is stored in only one location, while in a brain, the same "bit" is usually stored in numerous different locations, though in slightly differing forms and associations. In the Bible (like the brain), all teachings on any individual subject—for example, honesty, marital fidelity, salvation,

the Sabbath, the millennium—are not limited to just one location and not discussed in any other location. Just the opposite is in fact true: the Bible discusses many subjects within the same chapters and even within the same verses, while each subject may be discussed throughout numerous books and dozens of verses. So here again is the paradox: How can we comprehend the Bible if we must understand all the doctrines before we can understand any one, and we cannot understand all the doctrines until we understand the sum total of each individual one? The only solution to the paradox is through the leading of God's Holy Spirit and by diligent, dedicated Bible study. The Bible is indeed the full expression of God's mind and purpose for humanity.

One of the ways to begin to comprehend the unifying flow of the whole Bible is to follow its primary themes all the way through. Of all these, surely the most consistent, decisive and relevant is Jesus Christ. He, in essence, is the focal point of the entire Bible. He is the personality around whom everything revolves. Jesus Christ was the Creator of all things (Col. 1:16); the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the Rock of Israel as Messiah (.Is. 9:53) and Lawgiver (Isa. 33:22), and exemplified throughout the New Testament as Savior and King. He is the Redeemer of all mankind, the supreme Lawgiver and consummate Teacher. He was the firstborn from the dead and is the captain of our salvation, our constant Intercessor and merciful High Priest. Jesus Christ is now the active head of God's Church and is prophesied throughout the entire Bible to return to earth as King of kings and Lord of lords to set up, the Kingdom of God for all eternity.

Perhaps one of the most basic statements of how God has revealed Himself to man is found in Hebrews 1:1⁻²; "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son."

This passage evinces several important things about God's communication to man. First, God's message comes in many various forms. Second, that message is also mediated by human beings. This means that the divine Word comes to us in a human vehicle. Even Jesus Christ, the divine Son, was Himself in the flesh when He gave many of His teachings; furthermore, those teachings were not written down by Him but by His human followers.

Some further points are important to understand in setting the stage for proper biblical understanding. Third, no human vehicle is fully adequate to convey the fullness of God's message. Human language is inadequate to express what can be discerned in its complete spiritual sense only by means of the Holy Spirit. There is also the problem of transmission of the text; this is done by human beings and subject to human error. The problem of understanding ancient languages which have changed structure and meaning through the ages or have even ceased to be used as a living form of communication adds a further difficulty.

Fourth, the message of the Bible must speak to all people in every age. Yet society changes, culture modifies, and each Christian finds himself living in a particular situation which does not exactly fit that of the original writers of the Bible. Christians do not live in the Old Testament theocracy of ancient Israel with autonomous control of a particular territory. Nor do they live in the New Testament world of Greco-Roman culture. Rather, Christians have lived in radically different environments down through the centuries, from Cologne in the Middle Ages to London in the 17th century to Los Angeles in the nuclear age. Therefore, there is always a certain "communication or generation gap" between the written word and the later reader.

Fifth, God has deliberately hidden much of His important truth from mankind so that the full progression, and eventually resolution, of human history would proceed according to God's timetable. As a result it is not man's fault that he doesn't understand the Bible. Even the prophets of old didn't always grasp the meaning of their own biblical statements (e.g. Dan. 12:8); and they surely didn't comprehend the fullness of the mystery of the purpose of human life (Matt. 13:17; Eph. 3:4-5). Jesus Himself spoke in parables so that the common people would not understand what He was saying (Matt. 13:10-11); He was teaching His disciples not the masses (v. 10-17), since God's plan did not yet call for the vast majority of people to be called and converted.

Once these five points are recognized, a specific progression of biblical logic must be followed and accepted unless one is to falsely assume that God has left man in the dark about His basic purpose for mankind and plan of salvation. This progression can be summarized as follows:

1. The essential truths God wishes to convey will be intelligible to any normal person with even below average intelligence and education (if God has chosen to open his mind.) They can be discerned from any basic version or translation of the Bible which the reader understands. This must be true regardless of textual revision and/or incidental corruption and/or poor translation.

2. God must open a person's mind in order for him or her to understand the fullness of His truth. It is, of course, possible for human beings to learn many aspects of the Bible on their own, utilizing the mechanisms of intellect and the tools of scholarship. Yet God has so designed the Bible and the human mind that even with the most intense effort men cannot fully grasp the profound spiritual depth of the scriptures without the active involvement of the Spirit of God. The mind of man cannot understand the things of God—the mysteries of God—without the supernatural help from the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:7-11). Since human language is always inadequate to break through the boundaries of spiritual reality and truth, a perceptive spiritual understanding of the Bible requires the direct intervention and action of the Holy Spirit "bearing witness with our spirit" (Rom. 8:16), thereby effecting a change in the mind of the individual. Only God can make this decision to open our minds through His Spirit. It makes no difference how vehemently a human being desires to understand the Bible, nor how hard he studies it. Though such study will produce much knowledge, this knowledge will remain physically oriented and bound, forever missing the vital key of spiritual enlightenment Paul wrote, "So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16); so it is with true biblical understanding. Faith, as well, is a critical factor in achieving the spiritual comprehension necessary to understand the Bible. One must be convinced beyond the scope of the experimentally controlled and repeatable data demanded by scientists as verified "proof," that God exists and that the Bible is His inspired Word. The faith for such an absolute belief can come only through God's Holy Spirit.

3. The message of the Bible is theological. The Bible is not a history or science text. Its purpose is not to dictate on matters of art, technology, personal taste or the vast world of knowledge which man is capable of discovering for himself via the precious gift of man's God-given mental capacities. The Bible rather gives those essential theological and religious truths which man could not find out for himself through the academic disciplines.

4. The Bible contains various types of literature, each of which must be understood on its own terms. It contains history, poetry, parable metaphor and symbolic revelation. It is often a record of those things which it elsewhere condemns, such as false opinions, lies, misunderstandings, deceptions and heinous sins of every type. This leads to the next point.

5. The biblical message is gained from the Bible as a whole, not from reading a verse or two in isolation or otherwise "proof-texting." What may seem to be a blanket statement in one passage can be greatly qualified elsewhere. The picture given by one book may be somewhat altered in the light of the teachings in another. One must perceive and comprehend the full spectrum of biblical doctrine in general in order to properly understand almost any specific element in particular.

6. The resources of modern scholarship, properly handled, can add insight, detail and historical color to the basic biblical message. God has designed the Bible so that the essential message of God must be clear to any spirit-led person seeking humbly to learn the plan of salvation as expressed in His word. Indeed an uneducated Christian reading an inadequate translation will be able to understand the fundamental doctrines necessary for salvation. Nonetheless, a technical understanding of ancient languages, literature, history, society and other information put at our disposal by contemporary scholarship will enhance a person's total understanding of the Bible. The various books of the Bible were not written in a vacuum. To achieve a deeper understanding of their teachings, one must strive to grow in the knowledge of the history and background of the Bible, and the cultures in which they arose. Thus a Christian may add scholarly knowledge and understanding to the revealed spiritual knowledge which can come only from God. This physical data will in turn embellish and enhance his spiritual understanding.

7. Because of changed situations and society, there has to be some institution to clarify the meaning of the Bible for the Christian in the particular age in which he lives (Acts 8:31). Recognizing this need, Jesus Christ established and sustains His Church, to which He has given the responsibility to determine how to apply the Bible in particular situations in which the various individual Christians would not necessarily be unified. Even though the Bible always stands at the foundation of Christian belief, the Church can still come to decisions under the

guidance of the Holy Spirit which were not specified in the pages of the Bible itself. For example, just as Moses modified the statutes and judgments of Israel for use in an agrarian society, and just as Paul made decisions that he did not learn from the Lord (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:12), so the Church today must render judgments based on biblical laws and principles in order to keep itself relevant and vital in our modern age.

The essential element here is unity of the believers and coherence of the Church. Members of the Church must have a common body of beliefs, traditions, customs, practices and procedures in order to remain united. And this unity is vital if a collective work is to be done. A Christian in isolation will have to render his own judgments, and two such Christians will not always agree. But if we must have fellowship together (which God says we need for our spiritual development), if we must be in the same Church together (which God states is critical for our spiritual sustenance), and if we must accomplish a major work together (which is our collective, God-given commission), then God's government must be authorized to finalize doctrine, discern interpretations, administrate decisions, etc. And God's government can be established only by and through God's Church.

In summary, Christians should study the Bible diligently, respect it as the Word of God and seek its guidance through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26; 16:13) and the teachings of the Church. In order to become like God, we must seek to understand the Bible, which is the clearest expression of the mind of God. This we can only hope to achieve through profound and regular Bible study, and through the internalized implementation of its precepts and values.

Thus, God's word is a totally unique collection of writings absolutely profound in every sense, making commonly available to all mankind the words of life—the hope for today and the promise of tomorrow. It is man's responsibility and privilege to seek out the incredible depths and riches of God's mind as revealed in His Word.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

JESUS CHRIST

Doctrinal Statement

Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the son of God and the son of man. He was the prophesied Messiah of the Old Testament and is described throughout the New Testament as being both fully human and fully divine. As the second member of the God Family, He has existed from eternity as the "Word." He divested Himself of His power and majesty and became a human being to die for the sins of all mankind as our loving and merciful Savior. He was then resurrected and ascended to heaven to become our high priest. Jesus Christ shall return to establish the Kingdom of God on earth and rule as King of kings with His saints
forever.

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone and foundation of Christianity, the focal point of both Old and New Testaments and of biblical prophecy. He is the One around whom God's plan of redemption and salvation revolves.

Christ as the "Word of God" (Jn. 1:1) has existed with the Father from eternity. He and the Father together devised a plan to reproduce themselves and to expand their Family by means of the human creation. This creation was accomplished by the One who became Christ through the agency and power of the Holy Spirit. "For by him /Christ/ were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible" (Col. 1:16). John adds that "all things were made by him? and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn. 1:3). Thus the "Word of God"—Christ—was also the Creator God, who fashioned the universe and breathed the breath of life into Adam.

The Being who later became Jesus Christ was likewise the God of the Old Testament and hence the One who walked with Noah and talked with Abraham and with Moses (Jn.8:58; cf. Ex. 3:14) . He was the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who gave His law to Moses at Sinai. He was the One who led Israel with a cloud by day and protected them by a pillar of fire at night. He was Israel's Protector, their Guide and their "Rock"— ("and that Rock was Christ," 1 Cor. 10:4). He likewise was the God of David and was the One who dwelled in Solomon's Temple. He spoke through Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and all the prophets and inspired the entirety of the Old Testament.

In order to fulfill the divine master plan of salvation, this great Being divested Himself of all His power, might and majesty and took upon Himself "the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7), As envisioned, however darkly, by Abraham and Moses, and as prophesied by Isaiah and others, God's "Word" was now incarnate, the son of God and the son of man. As a human being, Jesus led a sinless, perfect life although He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). He overcame Satan's temptations and qualified to replace

him as the ruler of this world. He was our example who learned obedience through suffering; He became our Savior whose atoning death paid the death penalty for all the sins of mankind.

This great personal sacrifice of Christ's crucifixion is a perfect illustration of Jesus' love and mercy toward us. In Christ's own words the greatest love a man can have is to "lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13). And Jesus' sacrifice for us is even more powerfully poignant in that "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8), "when we were still/ enemies" (v.10) and not yet friends, Jesus laid down His life for us. Certainly the giving of His life on the cross for all humanity was the greatest example of the greatest love which can be shown.

Christ's resurrection from the dead was the focal point of universal history—an event of ultimate importance without equal in the unfolding of God's master plan. His burial for three days and three nights and His subsequent resurrection was the very sign and proof of His Messiahship (Mt. 12:40). His resurrection proved that man could also be resurrected; it showed the viability of God's plan and was the means by which human beings could eventually be resurrected to eternal life.

The death of Christ—the Creator of everything—was designed "from the foundation of the world" (Rev.13:8) and was able to pay the penalty for the sins of humanity because His life was worth far more than the sum total of all the lives of all human beings who have ever lived or ever will live. Upon repentance and baptism, we have the opportunity to take advantage of Christ's sacrifice to pay the penalty for our own personal sins, and through God's grace to receive the gift of eternal life—which Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection made possible.

Christ has now ascended and is exalted at the right hand of God the Father at the throne of heaven. He is once again actually God, all-powerful and shining in the spirit realm like the sun (Rev. 1:13-16), yet with the same mercy and compassion He exemplified during His physical life. Jesus is the first fruits of salvation, the first mortal to be made immortal, the first human being to become a member of the God Family. He is the Christian's elder brother and the forerunner of our salvation, the consummate High Priest and Advocate, Intercessor and Mediator before God's throne of mercy.

Although Christ is under the Father in authority, it is through Christ that we learn of the Father. Christ is the "express image" of the Father (Heb. 1:3), and "he that hath seen j/Christ/ hath seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9). Thus we learn of the Father, of His plan, His ways, His character, His laws and His love, through His first begotten and His "firstborn" son, Jesus Christ,

Jesus Christ, today, is the living Head of His Church, actively, intelligently and personally guiding and directing it through the Holy Spirit of God. He is simultaneously fully involved in the relentless sweep of mankind's historical events as He prepares to intervene in the end time of world history, returning to earth in full power and authority to take over the governments of this earth and to set up His divine Kingdom of God as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Christ, who began the creation, will also finish it. After the completion of His 1,000-year rule, Jesus Christ will turn everything over to His Father, and God Himself will join His billions of spirit-composed sons as the new heaven and new earth are created (Rev. 21). God and His Family will then rule the universe forever, and of "the increase of his government . . . there shall be no end" (Is. 9:7).

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

HOLY SPIRIT

Doctrinal Statement

The Holy Spirit is the essence, power, mind and spiritual extension of God. God begets Christians as His sons through this Spirit. It strengthens a Christian spiritually, converts his mind and serves as an earnest or guarantee of eternal life.

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Holy Spirit is described in the Bible as "the Spirit of God," "the Spirit of the Lord," "the Spirit of Jesus Christ," "the Spirit of truth," and "Comforter" or "Advocate." It is the power of God, the mind of God and the extended means by which God accomplishes His Work throughout the universe. As such, the Holy Spirit is not a separate being; it has no independent existence as an individual entity or person within the Godhead.

It was through His Spirit that God created the earth (Gen. 1:2). It was through this Spirit that David received his moral strength (Ps. 51:10-13), and by it Elijah and Elisha—men with normal physical proclivities and weaknesses—were made into powerful prophets of God (2 Kings 2:9,15). Even though these men and others had access to God's Spirit, it is also clear that they were among the relative few who in the Old Testament era were blessed with the privilege of actually having the mind and power of God work with or dwell within them.

God uses His Spirit to accomplish all His work. Whether causing prophets to prophesy, kings to reign, craftsmen to create (Ex. 31:3), bodies to be moved (Ezek. 3:12,14) or people to keep His laws (Ezek. 36:26-27), everything God does is through the power of His Spirit.

God is spirit (Jn. 4:24); both members of the Godhead ("Elohim") , Father and Son, are literally composed of spirit; they are wholly made of spiritual essence, in the same fashion as we are made of physical particles. Yet God the Father and Jesus Christ are separate beings: each maintains His own distinct identity and independent existence; and each, therefore, utilizes His own "Spirit," though both the Father's Spirit and Christ's Spirit are an integral part of the common Holy Spirit. The Being who later became Jesus Christ was the God who revealed Himself to the patriarchs and prophets and worked with them. When He utilized His mind, His nature and His power, He was doing so through His Holy Spirit which was the projection of His own unique, perfect spiritual power. God the Father was unknown in the Old Testament; Jesus Christ came to reveal Him in the New. God the Father was the One who begot Jesus Christ; He did so

through His Spirit, which is the same Spirit He begets spiritual children through today. Indeed, God the Father has retained to Himself the unique capacity to beget new spiritual beings.

Under the New Covenant the Spirit of the Father has been made available in a universal way, as was explained by Peter on the day of Pentecost when the Church began (Acts 2:17-18). Before His death, Christ promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit, which then worked with them should be given to them and should actually be in them (Jn. 14:17). This "Comforter" should teach the disciples all things and remind them of all that Christ had said to them (Jn. 14:26).

This same Spirit which was given to the disciples on the day of Pentecost is available to all whom God calls. Upon true repentance granted by God and upon true belief in Jesus Christ, one may be baptized and then receive God's Spirit through the laying-on-of-hands ceremony performed by God's ministers (Acts 2:38; 8:12-17). God further states that He gives His Holy Spirit only to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). God's Holy Spirit is efficacious—it creates deep changes within the individual, actually converting or changing the type of mind that the person possesses. The Holy Spirit generates within Christians its very fruit, which "is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22-23). It encourages us through trials and empowers us to do the Work of God.

Once a person receives the precious gift of the Holy Spirit, he must use it in order to grow in the knowledge and grace of God. God's Spirit gives Christians the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) to enable them to view life from a godly perspective instead of from a selfish one. It is this power that gives us the capacity to obey God. The deep mystery of the plan of God for mankind cannot be completely and totally understood without the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:7-10).

Of even greater significance is the fact that through this Spirit we are actually "begotten" as sons of God and become members of the body of Christ—the Church (1 Cor. 12). The seed of this Holy Spirit, planted by God after baptism, grows and develops spiritually within us as we grow in obedience and submission to God's law. The Holy Spirit is dynamic: it flows from God to and through the Christian and is expressed in his attitudes and actions. The more we use God's Spirit the stronger our new spiritual life

becomes. Finally, at the resurrection, this spiritual part of us becomes the totality of our composition and essence and overtakes the physical, so "that mortality /our physical essence/ might be swallowed up of /spiritual/ life" (2 Cor. 5:4) .

God's word reveals that the Holy Spirit is an "earnest"—a formal pledge or assurance—of eternal life which God has implanted within us making us sons. As long as this Spirit is living within us, we are actually sons of God and brothers of Christ. "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9). "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). Indeed, the presence of the Holy Spirit is the best criterion to define the true Christian: it is his only real ratification, for one cannot be a true Christian without it. As long as we nurture the Holy Spirit, and continue to renew it daily within us (2 Cor. 4:16) through prayer and diligent study of God's Word, then this earnest of God's Spirit is the absolute guarantee that we will be resurrected to spiritual life at Christ's return (cf. Eph. 1:14).

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

MANKIND

Doctrinal Statement

The greatest truth of the Bible is that God is reproducing Himself through mankind. Hence, humanity's goal and purpose for existence is, ultimately, to enter God's Family and to become literal sons of God. Human beings are physical beings with no inherent immortality, but they can receive eternal life as a free gift from God. Man was created by God to be wholly flesh and blood, yet in God's image and with a spiritual component added to his brain to create the human mind.

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

To understand that God is reproducing Himself through mankind is absolutely essential for understanding the nature of man. The fact that human beings were made with the potential and the destiny of entering God's Family as His literal children and thereby actually sharing His God-level plane of existence is fundamental to our knowledge of who and what we are.

Man was created as a physical being, a "living soul" (Gen. 2:7). The English word "soul" is translated from the Hebrew word nephesh and simply means a "living, breathing creature." The same word is used in reference to all "breath-bearing life" (which is a good working definition of nephesh)—animal as well as human life. Nephesh refers to animals in Genesis 1:20,21,24; 2:19; 9:10,12,15 (where it is translated "creature") and also Genesis 1:30; 9:4; Leviticus 11:10; 17:11, etc. (Note a legitimate, literal translation of Genesis 1:20: "let the waters swarm with a swarm of living souls.")

The Greek equivalent of nephesh is psuche, which also literally means "breath," animal as well as human (Rev. 8:9; 16:3). Thus the biblical "soul" is just the physical life of man and beast--man and beast alike. Solomon makes the point clear: "For man's fate is a beast's fate, one fate befalls them both; as the one dies so the other dies, the same breath is in them all" (Eccles. 3:19, Moffatt).

Interestingly enough, nephesh is also used to represent "dead bodies"--"dead nepheshes" or "dead souls" (Lev. 21:1,11; Num. 6:6,11, etc.). The biblical "soul" then can simply become the "body," and when it dies it dies all over. Thus man is a living soul which lives and dies as does any animal soul; therefore, man neither has nor is an "immortal soul."

Ezekiel twice states that "the soul that sinneth it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4,20). Jesus proclaimed that both the body and the soul can be destroyed in hell (Mt. 10:28). John agreed: "no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 Jn. 3:15)/ and Paul concurred: "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

In Psalm 146:4 we read that when man's "breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." Solomon wrote that "the dead know not any thing" (Eccles. 9:5). Clearly then, when a human being dies, he is indeed mentally as well as physically dead—wholly unconscious, unaware, unknowing. The example of David confirms this. Here was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), the eternal King of Israel (Ezek. 37:24); yet Peter stated that "David ... is both dead and buried/ and ... is not ascended into the heavens" (Acts 2:29,34).

Although man and animals have identically mortal "souls," man has been created superior to animals in a number of important respects. First, God shows that man was made in His own "image" and "likeness" (Gen. 1:26)—and therefore carries the general appearance of God, unlike the animals who are simply made "after their kind." In addition, God has given "the spirit of man" to humans. This "spirit in man," a nonphysical component which God designed to combine with the human brain to form the human mind, is the primary factor which distinguishes man from animals, elevating man's mental capacity from the wholly physical to the spiritual. The spirit in man imparts godlike abilities and capacities. Man is thus able to experience a likeness to God in his mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions; however, man is presently limited to the physical dimension while God lives and moves in the spiritual dimension. Man is physical and mortal, but through the spirit in man has the potential of moving into the God-plane level of existence and of becoming spiritual and immortal.

The spirit in man, then, is that essence which imparts human mind power to physical brain tissue. It is the means by which man exercises his promised "dominion" over all other creatures (Gen. 1:26).

The spirit in man is not an "immortal soul"; it has absolutely no consciousness apart from the brain. Job speaks of such a spirit: "it is a spirit in man . . . that giveth them understanding" (Job 32:8, Jewish Pub. Soc.). Paul asks, "What human being can understand the thoughts of a man except /by means of/ the spirit of man which is in him" (1 Cor. 2:11, Moffatt; cf. KJV). This simply states that self-consciousness—the awareness of thoughts, not just the thoughts themselves¹—is generated by the spirit in man. The spirit of man is not the man, but rather a spiritual essence

which provides man with his utterly unique characteristics of self-awareness and mind, and thus lifts him far above the level of mere animal intelligence.

Zechariah shows that the Eternal God of Israel "formeth the spirit of man within him" (Zech. 12:1). No immortal soul here—the "spirit of man" and the "him" are separate entities, with the former located "within" the latter. Paul confirms that this "spirit of man" is "in him" (1 Cor. 2:11). This does not say that man is a spirit, but rather that this "spirit" is located in the man. (If a man swallows a marble, that marble would be 'in him, but does that then make the man a marble? The man may have "lost his marbles," but he is surely not a marble himself.)

If we are not careful, we can very quickly begin to think that the spirit in man possesses conscious sensation, thought and awareness independent of the brain. This is wholly wrong. The spirit in man, of itself, cannot sense, cannot think, cannot reason, cannot know. The brain performs these tasks. But to engender the exquisite qualities which constitute the human mind, the spirit in man must be added.

We can liken the spirit in man to a blank recording tape and the human brain to a tape recorder—neither one able to generate the human mind without the other. The tape recorder houses all the machinery and wirings required for its particular operation, that of sound reproduction. Likewise, the human brain contains all the necessary structures and circuits for its manifold responsibilities—which are sensation, memory, emotion, creativity, etc. Just as the tape recorder produces nothing without the recording tape running through it, so the human brain is severely limited without the spirit in man joined to it. The recording tape imparts the capacity of auditory reproduction to the tape recorder; this same tape also records and stores the magnetic impress from the tape recorder. Analogously, the spirit in man imparts the capacity of creative intellect and self-conscious personality to the brain, while at the same time recording and storing the stamp impress from the brain.

At death, the spirit in man "tape" is complete—it contains, at that time, the incredibly detailed, indelible record of every nuance of life, thought, personality, attitude and character which made one exactly the singular individual he was. The "tape" can then be "filed"—until needed again for reactivation, an event called the "resurrection" in

biblical terminology. Solomon alludes to this "filing" of the spirit in man as well as to the mortality of the man in Ecclesiastes 12:7: "Then /at death/ shall the dust /the human being/ return to the earth as it was: and the spirit /the spirit-in-man tape/ shall return unto God who gave it."

Again, we can easily make the mistake of attributing consciousness to this filed-away "tape" which is no more the former living individual than a boxed piece of magnetic recording tape is the peaceful third movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. In order to reconstitute those serene musical vibrations from the magnetic recording tape, the tape must be reinserted into a tape recorder. Similarly, in order to reconstitute the specific person's conscious awareness from the "spirit-in-man tape," the spirit in man must be reinserted into a brain. Therefore, a reorganized brain and body (whether spiritual or physical) are necessary adjuncts to the spirit-in-man tape in order to reactivate— or resurrect—the original individual.

Man was created physical, mortal and limited so that God could work with and prepare him for his ultimate destiny. God's moral character is self-determined by His own free choice. If man is to be like Him and share eternity on His level, he must also be free to make his own decisions and thus to build his own character. Physical life provides the arena for man to learn the object lessons necessary to become like God in character. This kind of character can be developed only through time and experience.

Freedom of choice requires the possibility of rejecting God's character and way of life. If a man, given every conceivable opportunity over a protracted period of time, becomes set in the kind of moral character which would poison him and his environment, God in His infinite mercy and wisdom would not endow that man with His eternal life and unlimited potential.

The Bible states that when God created man, He "saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Man was thus not created with an evil nature. This is confirmed in Ecclesiastes 7:29: "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright." On the other hand, man was not created with the righteous, holy character of God, which it is impossible to create instantaneously. One might say man was created morally neutral so that he could develop moral character through experiencing life.

Although a free moral agent, with the full capacity to make his own decisions, man is subject to influences. As a part of the human learning and growing process, God has allowed Satan, the ultimate source of evil, to influence man for the period of human history. Much of what can be called the natural mind—the mind in opposition to God's mind—is a result of Satan's influence as well as man's own wrong choices as he lives and experiences life without God's guidance. It is important to understand that God did not create man with an intrinsically evil nature but rather with free choice, and subject to the influences of both good and evil.

All humans are born morally neutral, as was Adam when he was first created. Unfortunately, Adam chose to follow Satan the Devil and thus sinned, with the result that his frame and direction of mind became evil and perverted. Likewise, as we sin, our minds become perverted from their moral neutrality and become instead self-oriented, filled with vanity, jealousy, lust and greed—becoming oriented as Satan's mind is oriented, in opposition to the orientation of God's mind. The Bible states that "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7), and that man's "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9)—reflecting clearly in both scriptures what is the attitude of Satan.

How does this happen? How does man reflect Satan's nature? Ephesians 2:2 reveals some critical, indeed startling, information. Satan is called "the prince of the power of the air," projecting a form of "spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." This seems to indicate that Satan the Devil has the capacity to influence individual human beings by having his negative, evil "spirit" affect their neutral spirit in man, much as a radio broadcast will affect thousands of neutral radio receivers to "play its tune."

The only antidote to Satan's broadcast—the remedy required to change the heart of man—is God's Holy Spirit. It is impossible for man to obey God in the full spirit of the law without it. And this is precisely what God wants us to learn: that we desperately need God's Holy Spirit in order to have our minds and hearts converted, to have our whole direction of life changed to follow God's way.

The spirit in man is, of itself, incomplete. It indeed elevates man's mental capacity to the spiritual plane, but all this does is cause spiritual problems without any spiritual

solutions. The existence of the spirit in man clearly demonstrates our burning need of the missing dimension of the Spirit of God. Thus the reality of the spirit in man becomes the focal point of all human life. And it is in the arena of human survival that the spirit in man takes on monumental significance because the mere existence of a spiritual component in the human mind unveils the fundamental cause underlying all mankind's troubles.

Consider what the spirit in man signifies; the human mind operates with a spiritual dimension, and that means spiritual problems. The spirit in man adds spiritual problems to the physical human brain. (The human mind and its resultant spiritual problems are as directly related together as are animal brain and its resultant instinctive behavioral patterns. Thus, while the animal brain maintains perfect harmony in nature, the human mind is about to utterly destroy the earth I)

That is the crux of the matter—that is why mankind is planning its own extinction; human beings have spiritual problems but only physical solutions--and physical solutions just cannot solve spiritual problems. This is why the spirit in man must become the focal point of all human knowledge, because it enables us to understand—for the first time—that all man's physical difficulties are caused by deep-seated spiritual complications. No amount of physical measures—no matter how intricate or expensive—will ever improve the overall welfare and happiness of the human race. If we ever hope to solve our physical problems and have an abundantly happy world, our spiritual problems must be solved first.

The spirit in man is the key to man. The knowledge of it suddenly reorients us. It points us in the proper direction. It tells us where we must look if we are ever to have a peaceful planet.

Spiritual solutions are needed to solve spiritual problems. If this one fundamental point were understood, man should be forced to realize that the structure of his entire society—from the government of nations to the behavior of children—needs radical revision before people can at last be joyfully busy with peace and progress.

This is where God's plan of salvation comes in. God first calls us by opening our minds to His truth, leading us to recognize our wretched, sinful state, cut off from

God. Then upon our heartfelt repentance and sincere acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Savior, God enables us through baptism and the laying on of hands to receive His Spirit. Conversion by God's Holy Spirit means a renewing of one's mind (Rom. 12:2), a complete changing of one's attitude and heart; it is the creation of a new man, walking in newness of life (Rom. 6:4) and obeying God from the heart as a servant of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18). Through God's Spirit man can have the fellowship and communion with God that is so important to growth in God's mind and character.

It is not fully revealed how God's Spirit actually works. We know that it alters our whole mental outlook and direction in life from evil to good, from satanic to godly--yet how does it do this? Romans 8:16 states that God's Holy Spirit "itself beareth witness with our spirit /in man/ that we are the children of God," This begins to show that God's Holy Spirit functions by working through the spirit in man which is the intrinsic spiritual component of every human mind. If to this we add the biblical analogies of conversion to begetting and of spiritual conception to physical conception, we arrive at the working model of God's Holy Spirit impregnating and energizing man's spirit much as a male sperm impregnates and energizes a female ovum. (There are many spiritually instructive understandings and extrapolations to be derived from this analogy.) Thus the spirit in man becomes the focal point of human existence; it is the one essential element differentiating us from animals; and it is, at the same time, both the vehicle through which Satan can influence us and our link with the divine, giving us the full potential for spiritual conception through God's Holy Spirit.

Although the negative or evil side of man must be dealt with, the Worldwide Church of God chooses to focus on the positive and awesome potential of mankind. This is the heart and core of the message Jesus brought to man. Through God's grace and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ man can be forgiven of his wrong choices and sins. God in His infinite love and wisdom has provided a plan by which man can, as a free moral agent, gain the experience and character necessary to receive eternal life. If the spiritual essence God gives us at baptism continues to grow within us, we will personally be born into God's Family at the resurrection. Conversely, God shall destroy in the lake of fire any who absolutely refuse to repent and obey Him, that is, those who have been spiritually aborted. From

this we draw the conclusion that there is no "second chance" for those who totally reject God and His way after having been enlightened—their end is to be burned (Heb. 6:8). But not having a "second chance" presupposes that every person must really have a full first chance for salvation. This means that God can only condemn unrepentant, deliberate sinners "who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:4-5). To have a real opportunity for salvation, to be judged by God, human beings must really know the truth (Heb. 10:26).

Since it is God's will and purpose for all men to reach their full potential as sons of God, all men shall have a full opportunity to actualize that potential. Thus mankind will become God (as its family name), and God's Family will grow into the multiple billions. The lengthy history of man's mostly negative experience is only one phase of God's plan, not the final chapter.

The ultimate destiny of man is truly beyond our limited comprehension now, although God does give us certain hints. God's purpose is to put "all things"—everything—including the whole universe, under man (Heb. 2:8). Not only are human beings promised eternal life but also the sharing of all that it means to be in the Family of God. God's greatest desire is to share everything with us. His only concern is that His sons be prepared in character, attitude and experience for that fabulous destiny.

Thus we see that God did not conclude His spiritual creation in the first seven days recorded in Genesis 1 and 2. Rather, those chapters record the physical creation of man. God is now working with man spiritually and creating His own character in man so that in time he might be born into God's Kingdom to share God's greatness as a veritable son of God for eternity. Earth is thus the proving ground where we physical human beings can gain the character necessary to rule with God for all time.

Although the ultimate purpose of human life is to be fulfilled at the resurrection, God does not neglect the present physical life. Indeed the fulfillment, abundance, happiness and success of this human life are an integral part of God's plan. The entirety of the book of Proverbs is filled with instructions and exhortations explaining

how men, women and children should act in order to achieve the maximum success in their lives. God truly wants all mankind to prosper, with everyone achieving his and her own fullest individual potential in all areas of living: social, economic, intellectual, family and personal. Jesus Christ stated that "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10) . And the apostle John gives it the proper perspective: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health" (3 Jn. 2). In line with God's most magnificent truth of man's destiny, the Worldwide Church of God upholds and seeks to promote the dignity of man in every facet of human life.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD
SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

ANGELIC REALM

Doctrinal Statement

God has created powerful spirit beings as His aids, agents, and messengers. Since man's creation, these spirit beings, called *angels* in the English Bible, function as ministering spirits to help mankind attain salvation. Like man, angels have free moral agency. Although created to help God, some of them—led by Satan the Devil—rebelled against God's government transforming themselves into demons.

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Before the time of man, God created powerful spirit beings (Job 38:7) in vast numbers (Rev. 5:11). Although created before and on a higher plane than man, these beings will eventually be under man in authority when humanity has entered God's Family (Heb. 2:7-8).

The Bible gives relatively few specifics about the numerous types and responsibilities of these spirit beings, mentioning them in context but not dwelling on them in point. Apparently, all of these created spirit beings of whatever variety or power are generally labeled as "angels," although the Bible nowhere directly makes that statement. The English word "angel" comes from the Greek word *angelos* which means "messenger" or "agent." The Hebrew word *malak* has the same meaning.

A number of specific types of angels are generally described. Cherubim are explained in Ezekiel 1 and 10 as having four wings and four faces (of a lion, ox, eagle and man) and covering (or carrying) God's throne. Seraphim are "full of eyes before and behind," having six wings and appearing either like a lion, a calf, an eagle or with the face of a man (Is. 6:2-3; Rev. 4:6-8)-. "Twenty-four elders" who apparently serve as counselors for God Himself are described in Revelation 4:4, 10-11. Angels have at times appeared on earth as men (Gen. 19:1-2), although it is not revealed whether this indeed can be their actual form or whether they had assumed the appearance of humans for their visit. (Some have wondered that since the physical world reflects the spiritual world—Rom. 1:20—could some of the animals of this earth be, at least, in some fashion, physical counterparts of angelic beings?—cf. Rev. 19:11.)

Although the above scriptures make plain that God has assigned angels various responsibilities, Hebrews 1:14 states they are also to help man attain salvation. "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?" The exact way or manner in which angels minister to men in this capacity is not comprehensively described in the Bible, but there are some allusions and references. Cherubim were sent to guard the way to the tree of life after Adam and Eve had been cast from the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). Parts of the law were given by the angels (Acts 7:35;

Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). In Genesis 18, angelic beings came to tell Abraham that he would have a son and in Genesis 19, they helped rescue Lot from the city of Sodom before it burned. Angels ministered to Jesus Christ after he withstood Satan for forty days and nights (Mat. 4:11). Matthew 18:10 suggests that God's angels watch over God's converted sons. Likewise we are told "there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents (Lk. 15:10). The angels even desire to "look into" the specifics of salvation (1 Pet. 1:12). One angel seems to be assigned to each of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 (Rev. 1:20); and different angels will be intimately involved in God's future intervention in world affairs (Rev. 7:1-2; Ez. 9; Rev. 8:3-5; 10:1, etc.), specifically in the final seven trumpets (Rev. 8:6 ff) and the seven final plagues (Rev. 15:1 ff). Further verses can be cited to show other specifically revealed times when angels have served man physically or spiritually. The thrust of all these passages is that the angels play an important role in God's salvation plan for man, and that their relationship with man is one of interest and personal concern.

Long before man one of the cherubim—his name in Latin is the familiar word Lucifer—had the honor of covering the very throne of God (Ezek. 28:14), indicating a position of very high authority and power in God's government. However, he was lifted up in his own vanity, became resentful and jealous of God, and finally rebelled against God's government. He drew with him as cohorts a third of the angels. These became evil angels or demons with Lucifer, now Satan the Devil, as their leader.

Satan is called the god of this world (II Cor. 4:4) and the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10). As "the prince of the power of the air" he "broadcasts" his perverted and evil attitudes of hatred, jealousy, envy, lust and greed to man. The mechanism for this influence is surely the evil environment of this present world, but seems also to involve some form of Satanic "spirit" that is now at work in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). These attitudes enter into the mind of man through the spirit in man (see MAN), perverting it to the twisted thinking of Satan. By this means, Satan and his demonic allies hope to destroy all human beings and ruin their chance for entering the family of God. These wicked spirits try to separate Christians from the love of God (cf. Rom. 8:38-39). A primary battle of a Christian is "against wicked spirits in high places"

(Eph. 6:12), It is a battle to resist the influences of Satan and his demons against a person's mind, God has given us the means to fight this spiritual battle. We must "put on the whole armor of God ...to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11); this spiritual armor includes truth, righteousness (v. 14), peace (v. 15), faith (v. 16), salvation, the word of God (v. 17), prayer and supplication (v. 18). Satan our adversary "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8); but he will flee from us if we resist him and draw near to God (James 4:7-8).

While angels are now above man in authority, they are not to be worshipped or prayed to, nor regarded as mediators between God and man (Col, 2:17). Nonetheless, we must, of course, acknowledge and respect their authority as powerful spiritual helpers of God and His created "sons" (Job 38:7). Even the archangel Michael dared not revile Satan the Devil, but appealed to God's authority when confronting him rather than his own (Jude 9). The biblical record shows that angels' authority over man is temporary (Heb, 1:13-14), and explains that man will eventually be in the position of judging the angels (I Cor. 6:3).

God is in supreme command and is only temporarily allowing Satan to influence man within certain confines (Job 1). This process actually enables man to build greater character by resisting Satan and by learning how to rely more on God. During the millennial rule of Christ, Satan is to be removed from the world scene along with his demons. Jesus Christ will replace Satan as the ruler of this world (cf. II Cor. 4:4 and Rev. 20:4-5). Following the millennium, Satan is to be released for a short span of time and then finally to be removed to a place of restraint for all eternity where he and his demons can no longer affect men or angels. But the faithful angels who have followed God throughout these countless eons of time will continue as servants of the greatly expanded Family of God for all eternity.

It is understandable how some have an extremely simplistic impression of the angelic/spiritual realm. From the brief glimpses the Bible gives of God's throne (Rev. 4), one can get the naive idea that angelic beings bow before God all the time as though in a beatific trance, repetitively incanting "holy, holy, holy..." constantly, without ever stopping or thinking. Likewise, one can easily think that the entire spiritual realm is very ethereal and rather dull when compared with the reality and tremendous variety of the physical realm as we know it.

In point of fact, this must be a total misconception. The spiritual realm is the true reality while the physical realm maintains an ethereal existence; the spiritual world is the true "substance," while the physical world is the "shadow." We can only begin to apprehend the invisible things of the spiritual realm by observing the visible things of the physical realm (Rom. 1:20). Indeed, the incredible variety and abundance of the physical universe must be paled into insignificance by the unimaginable majesty, beauty, complexity, and diversity of the spiritual universe. The few hints seen show an abundance of, for lack of a better term, spiritual "things" (which comprise just a portion of spiritual reality) that extends incredibly far beyond even angelic beings. The symbolism of spiritual cities, gates, rivers, trees, fruits in Revelation 21-22; horses, armies, and swords in Revelation 19; thrones and wheels in Ezekiel 1 and 10; thrones, clothes, crowns, gold, lightning, thunders, voices, lamps in Revelation 4 testify to an existence so incomprehensible that even the profuse utilization of physical analogies can scarcely do more than whet our appetite. Going farther/ there are spiritual books, seals, incense, vials, songs, hair, etc., with no indication of any limit to the scope of spiritual "things." Indeed, there is every reason to conclude that our present physical realm is drab, plain, and dull when compared with the unfathomable variety and ineffable splendor of the spiritual realm.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

SALVATION

Doctrinal Statement

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

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The goal of every Christian is to be saved from the death penalty of sin through the sacrifice of Christ and to receive the gift of eternal life in God's Family and Kingdom. This goal and the process by which it is attained is called salvation. It is the ultimate purpose of life and the explicit reason why mankind was created.

God created man in His image and after His likeness. But the creation process will not be complete until mankind is perfected spiritually—has perfect godly character created in him—and actually enters the God Family. God initiates this process by "calling" a person—opening his mind to understand, grasp and be convicted by the truth of the Bible. It is impossible for anyone to come to Christ unless the Father calls him (Jn. 6:44) , and God's calling "depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

If one responds to the realization of God's truth by believing it, committing oneself to it and by acting upon it, God will then grant him the miracle of true repentance (Rom. 2:4). Repentance is the state of mind which an individual attains through seeing and acknowledging his past sinful way of life, and by recognizing that he has broken God's laws (Rom. 3:23; 1 Jn. 3:4) and resolving to do so no longer. Repentance includes both a deep ("godly") sorrow over past wrongs (2 Cor. 7:10) and a steadfast determination to change the whole direction of one's life from disobedience to obedience of God. It is accompanied by a profound realization of the need for forgiveness and the help and strength of God to change.

Once a person has repented and professed a sincere faith in the person, message and sacrifice of Christ, he may be baptized by immersion for the forgiveness of sins. This baptism is a type of Christ's death, burial and resurrection, which is our means of reconciliation to God (Rom. 5:10) since He paid the death penalty for our sins. Baptism symbolizes the death and burial of one's old sinful way of life and the beginning of a totally new spirit-led life of obedience and submission to God. After baptism the new convert receives the Holy Spirit through the laying-on-of-

hands ceremony performed in accordance with the commands and examples of the apostles (Acts 8:12-17; 19:5-6).

God's Spirit is an absolute necessity for the spiritual creation process of salvation as it serves many functions. It begets one as the son of God; it strengthens him to face trials and tests, to overcome problems and to build godly character; and it converts and changes the person's whole direction of mind from being carnal to being spiritual (Rom. 8). As such, the Holy Spirit is the seed of eternal life within us which at the resurrection will overtake our mortality with immortality and clothe us with eternal life (Rom. 8:11; 2 Cor. 5:1-5). It is the guarantee to a Christian of eternal life which can only be negated by willful neglect or deliberate rejection.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is clearly the focal point of the salvation process. He was "put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). We "were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:10) and are thereby justified through faith in that reality (Rom. 5:1). Yet salvation must go beyond justifying the past, it must continue into the future throughout one's life. The true Christian is admonished to "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). Indeed, the active participation of Jesus Christ in one's life through His Holy Spirit is absolutely essential for ultimate salvation. As Romans 5:10 concludes "much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

This whole salvation process is by "grace" (Greek "favor"—Eph. 2:8)—it is unmerited and freely given by God and cannot in any way be earned. The Christian totally depends upon God's grace, initially for the forgiveness of sins at the time of baptism, and throughout his life for any sins he may commit subsequent to baptism. Nevertheless, the individual must meet certain criteria in order to be given this free gift.

First, the person must live by and grow in faith—a total and real conviction. One must have faith that God exists; faith that He will perform all of His biblical promises including that of granting him salvation (Rom. 4); faith that the death of Jesus Christ will pay the penalty for one's sins and reconcile him to God; and faith that the resurrection of the living Jesus Christ will enable him to attain eternal life.

Furthermore, a Christian must not be disobedient, since continual sin that is not repented of disqualifies one from God's Kingdom (I Cor. 6:9-11). Salvation is surely not earned by obedience, because salvation can in no way be earned (cf. Rom. 4:4). Nevertheless, Christ's response to one who asked Him what must be done in order to be saved was that the Commandments must be kept (Mt. 19:17). Furthermore, Christ told His disciples that at the resurrection He shall "reward every man according to his works" (Mt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12).

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 also illustrates why obedience and good works are necessary. Although salvation itself is a totally freely given gift (and hence is "by grace"), our individual responsibilities within God's Family and Kingdom shall vary according to the way we have lived our lives since baptism. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 shows plainly that we will receive responsibilities in direct proportion to the way we have conducted our lives.

Today, God is calling a relative few, but now is not the only day of salvation. Every human being who has ever lived shall have an opportunity for the greatest free gift that could ever be imagined. God wants all mankind to receive the opportunity for salvation (1 Tim. 2:4) and is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). To this end God is infinitely patient and has apportioned a time for all human beings from all times to be called to Him and to the ultimate gift of eternal life in the Family of God.

In summary, salvation is by grace, through faith, not earned by obedience but dependent upon obedience, with the degree of our ultimate reward being according to our works. This salvation process is thus one which entails our continuance in God's way and necessitates our endurance to the end (Mt. 10:22; 24:13). Only when that process is complete and we have been born as spirit beings into the Family of God shall salvation have been completely and totally achieved.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

FAITH

Doctrinal Statement

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 belief that He is in overall control—is a major element in the Christian life and is absolutely necessary for salvation.

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

"... the just shall live by his faith." 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 (I Pet. 1:5.9). Christ described faith as a weightier matter of the law (Mt. 23:23). Paul listed it among the three greatest Christian virtues (along with hope and love). Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Far from being simply a feeling in his heart, the Christian's faith motivates his entire pattern of living. Faith functions as the fulcrum of true Christian thought and behavior.

The two distinct meanings of the word "faith" are found in the English translation. When preceded by the definite article ("the faith") it means the overall system of doctrine and belief accepted by the Church, and by extension, the Church itself (Acts 6:7; 13:8, 14:22). When used without the article it means "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1) which is perhaps the clearest biblical definition of faith. Faith is thus an absolute belief that God exists and a total trust in His statements (Heb. 11:6).

Ultimately, faith deals with God's promises--with the future. It is the trust in "things not seen." Of course, belief cannot be blind. It must be built on genuine conviction. It has to come from perceiving God's hand in creation, His work in history and the experience of His fulfilled promises in one's own life. This is the foundation of faith. But one does not need faith in what has already been accomplished. Faith, therefore, is the willingness to believe God will not fail even though He has not actually brought about what is promised (Heb. 11:1).

True faith must come from God and has many facets, though the primary ones relate directly to Jesus Christ. Faith in its simplest but most profound manifestation is a deep personal belief in Jesus Christ; in the fact that He is our Savior; in the truth that His death paid the individual penalty of our personal sins. Faith is the full confidence in the message Jesus brought. This faith in Christ is the

belief that leads us to baptism. (Baptism is merely an outward symbolic testimony that we have inward faith in Christ.) Paul speaks of this faith in Galatians 2:16 when he remarks we "have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ."

After baptism, one receives God's Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. At this point Christ, through the Spirit, lives in us and empowers us with a growing and internalized godly faith. Since faith is not self-generated, but is rather the faith of Christ's Spirit in us, it is termed the "faith of Christ" (subjective genitive). It is this faith of Christ that we must express and live by in every facet of life.

But faith is not an end in itself. It is rather the vehicle by which we may obtain salvation. Of course, salvation can in no way be earned—either by obedience or faith—for nothing man can do would obligate God to grant salvation had He not decided to give man this gift of His own volition (according to certain terms). But God nevertheless has obligated Himself to grant salvation if one has living faith. God says the presence of this faith is counted in His eyes as righteousness and indeed justifies us before God (Rom. 4:1-7).

Faith is the motivator which causes us to live a godly life. From this it follows that one who has real belief in God and hopes in His promises will demonstrate this fidelity by his actions--by his obedience. Indeed, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23).

The true Christian will obey God and do good works, for "faith without works is dead" (Jas. 2:20). Our good works do not save us, but they do demonstrate faith. James wrote, "I will show you my faith by my works" (Jas. 2:18), directly contradicting the notion that faith can maintain an exclusively mental/spiritual existence devoid of any physical action and behavior. One who does not obey God is said to possess "dead" faith, a trait no better than that of the demons who themselves believe God exists but refuse to obey Him (Jas. 2:19).

To have real faith, does not mean that one will never doubt. Doubt is a normal human characteristic and emotion, and even the truly begotten Christian is not immune from it. Yet one must contest doubt, not by deluding oneself but by rehearsing reality. One should return to the fundamentals of biblical belief, to one's first love, by thinking the thoughts and doing the works he did when he was first being

converted. Doubt need not undermine faith, but true faith can surmount doubt.

God commands that "the just shall live by faith" in every facet and area of his life. One must fully live by faith, because God has made promises which affect virtually every part of man's existence. He has promised to help us in trials if we are faithful and to answer every prayer that is prayed according to His will and in faith. These expressions of faith are again not ends in themselves. In fact they are secondary as compared to a Christian's main thrust of faith which is belief in God's promise of the resurrection from the dead and in salvation. Other areas of faith are important only as they contribute to our faith in the resurrection. Paul says one who does not earnestly hope for the resurrection has "faith in vain" (1 Cor. 15:14), because one who has no hope of being resurrected from the dead has no hope at all! It is a Christian's faith in the resurrection from the dead which lies behind all his earthly actions. It is this faith and hope which encourages him to press onward toward salvation in spite of trials and disappointments.

God's ultimate design is to bring every human being from the human level to the divine level—from flesh to spirit—from a temporary physical existence to an eternal spiritual existence. This is the foremost frontier of faith. It involves development of character, which include the trials and experiences of human life. God's promises for the "good life" on the physical level are subordinated to His ultimate purpose of fulfilling His main promise on the spiritual level. A Christian who is living by faith realizes physical promises may be delayed for his spiritual benefit, but he knows that his life is absolutely in God's hands no matter what. Some by their faith have been delivered, while others by the same faith have been martyred (Heb. 11) or allowed to die without seeing the ultimate fruit of their endeavors in this life.

The faith of Christ in us is one of the fruits of God's Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22. As such it cannot be "worked up" and is in no other way self-generated. It should never be static but must be constantly growing and expanding in every aspect and area of life. This faith may be built and grow in different ways—through experience, through trials (Rom. 5:1-5), by reading the inspired word of God (Rom. 10:17), through the interaction with the faith of others, etc. Faith must be constant, unfeigned, based upon true promises, without time limit and always growing.

The Bible illustrates the faith of the patriarchs and men of God throughout history as an example and encouragement to us. We are told of Abraham, the father of the faithful. We are reminded of Enoch, Elijah, - Samson, Jephthah, David and the prophets. We see the awesome example of Jesus Christ Himself, who gave up His exalted position as God, emptied Himself into human form and was sacrificed in faith, so that He could become the Savior of mankind after the Father would resurrect Him. Likewise, we look at the examples of the apostles and of fellow brethren who were martyred for the sake of Christ. Finally, we learn that God will grant these faithful men salvation and eternal life in God's Kingdom, because they believed they would receive it, and because they had real faith. They will receive the reward they hoped for, because they believed that God existed and that He was the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). Our task is to follow their example and receive this same reward.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

REPENTANCE

Doctrinal Statement

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

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Repentance signals the start of a changed and godly life. It involves a fully conscious recognition of one's sinful, lawless way of life, a way of life that is antagonistic toward God and His law, accompanied by a firm conviction to make a total change and to begin to live in full accord with God's way of life as described in the Bible.

True repentance can occur only when God Himself opens one's eyes to see his past sinfulness by granting repentance (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). But repentance is much more than a recognition of personal sins. Repentance, rather is the process through which God leads us so that we can become progressively more like Him, thereby proceeding toward salvation as sons and daughters in His Divine Family which is God's ultimate desire for all humanity. As such, repentance should include the positive, joyful realization of the fact that it is God who grants repentance, that this repentance is "unto life" (Acts 11:18), and that all who are so called shall "come to know the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25).

True repentance is a complex and deeply personal phenomenon that can only be understood, in the final analysis, by experiencing it. The first component is the realization that there is a vast difference, a great gulf, between God and oneself (e.g. Job 42). The next aspect is an all-consuming desire to close that gap, to become more like God in character, thought and behavior, though the capacity to accomplish this is far beyond human power alone and requires the active involvement of God's Holy Spirit.

One who is coming to repentance must first understand that sin is the transgression of God's law (1 Jn. 3:4), the penalty for which is eternal death (Rom. 6:23). Added to this theoretical definition of sin must be the deep personal realization that one has indeed sinned and that his whole frame of mind and attitude of approach is oriented against God's law (Rom. 8:7). But the deceitfulness of sin blinds one to seeing his sinfulness unless God opens his mind to reality—to recognize that one indeed is a sinner. Genuine repentance, therefore, must come from

God Himself, and man cannot claim credit for it, though he has a part in it. His part is to acknowledge the truth about himself which God has shown him and then to act upon it.

In the process of seeing himself, a person comes to realize that the human "heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). Since sin is ultimately of the mind, he also begins to understand that even his own righteousness—which in an unconverted person is invariably motivated by selfishness—is only a "dirty rag," as it were, in God's sight (Is. 64:6). When an individual repents, he must compare his righteousness to God's righteousness and not to that of other human beings. When man compares himself to God—and with God's help sees himself as he really is—he is astonished at his own sinfulness and inadequacy.

Confronted with this reality, the person nearing repentance comes to appreciate that man is incapable of leading a godly life without God's direct help and intervention through His Spirit. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). While man's intentions are often the best—he may want to do good—he nevertheless finds himself caught in a struggle between them and his natural inclination toward evil. Romans 7 describes this struggle: "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (vv. 15-18). A person in an attitude of repentance feels a strong need for help in this spiritual dilemma and reaches out to God for aid through His Holy Spirit. Thus, Paul admitted that the only relief from this eternal conflict between the good of God and the evil of our own nature is "through Jesus Christ" (v. 25).

In his natural state without God's Spirit, man is cut off from God and indeed at enmity with God (Rom. 8:7; Is. 59:1-2). The story of Adam and Eve is an example of how this spiritual enmity has occurred in man (Rom. 5:12). The Genesis account indicates that Adam and Eve were born morally neutral—with the ability to do good or evil, right or wrong, but without an actual inclination toward either—God nonetheless instructed them in His law and

explained to them right from wrong. They had no reason to doubt God or to disobey until Satan, symbolized (and/or materialized) in Genesis 2 as a serpent, tempted them by saying God was both holding back knowledge from them and lying about death as the penalty for disobedience. Adam and Eve chose to obey Satan rather than God and so ate of the forbidden fruit. The effects of this sin cut them off from God as is evidenced by His thrusting them from the garden. It also caused a rationalization of, or a blinding to, the sin, as shown by Adam's attempt at justifying himself. Likewise, their act of stepping from the realm of moral neutrality to that of sinfulness through the initiation of this one sin caused deep and profound mental changes in Adam and Eve. They were no longer morally neutral but became evilly oriented in much the same way as was—and is—Satan, since Satan's attitude of mind had now influenced their own.

All human beings are, like Adam and Eve, born morally neutral. Yet living in Satan's world, surrounded by an ungodly environment, all persons soon sin, as did Adam and Eve. (To ask at what age or to try to discern the demarcation line between moral neutrality and sin is not practical.) Thus, sin has the same consequences in us as it did in Adam and Eve. It cuts us off from God, it blinds us to our own sinfulness and it changes our minds from neutrality to enmity against God (Rom. 8:7).

Viewed in this context, repentance is the bridge between a carnal mind, one that is at enmity against God, and a spiritual mind, one that has God's Spirit and is obedient and pleasing to the Creator. When one repents, he sees for the first time in his life the ungodly, debilitating, wicked orientation of his natural mind; he asks God for forgiveness and is baptized. He then receives the Holy Spirit which, working in and through his mind, actually changes or "transforms" it from carnal to spiritual (Rom. 12:2). This transformation is called "conversion." And repentance is the bridge—the first step—in this process of transformation.

Although repentance involves seeing the sinful side of oneself, thus generating negative personal feelings, it nevertheless has extremely positive aspects. Upon true repentance and baptism, one is forgiven of sin. The psalmist said, "Blessed is the man to whom sin is not imputed" (Ps. 32:2). The sheer joy of having one's sins forgiven is the sure knowledge of being right and clean before God. King David bore testimony to the positive, uplifting nature

of repentance when he prayed, "make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken /as a result of my sin⁷ may rejoice" (Ps. 51:8). One who has repented can rejoice at the impending forgiveness of his sins, joy indeed.

The most profound evocation of real repentance in the Bible must truly be this heartfelt prayer of David in Psalm 51. The occasion was Nathan the prophet's coming to him about his sin with Bathsheba. The prayer shows the important basic components of godly repentance: an attitude of abject wretchedness and contrite humility before God; a deep recognition of all one's sins, which are "ever before me"; the conviction that God can and will forgive all one's iniquities and cleanse him from all his sins; and the sure knowledge that God can and will create in a truly repentant individual "a clean heart" and put "a new and right spirit" in him, restoring "the joy of your salvation. "

Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment. (Ps. 51:1-4)

Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. (Ps. 51:9-12)

Godly repentance must, of course, be accompanied by "godly sorrow." Godly sorrow reflects a profound awareness that one has sinned against God. It is a sorrow that is felt because sin hurts others and works against God's master plan of salvation. It is this "godly sorrow" that "produces a repentance that leads to salvation" (2 Cor. 7:9-10).

On the other hand, God also speaks of "worldly sorrow." Worldly sorrow is not sorrow that one has committed sin, but just a momentary feeling brought on by adverse consequences such as results after one has been caught and is being punished. It is temporary self-pity, in no way involving

permanent change from sinning to obedience, and its end is death.

True repentance, conversely, is a deep-seated desire to change one's whole being. It is a desire to reform and redirect one's motivational approach to life. It is coming to abhor sin as God does. This type of repentance can come only from God. As we have seen, it is God who must give and lead one to repentance (Rom. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25).

In a more detailed way, repentance includes many things. It involves a profound sense of utter helplessness, realizing that to do what must be done is impossible by one's own willpower. It requires the conscious awareness that God must take an active part in redirecting and re-shaping one's life, for only God knows the way to life and only He can solve the problems of mankind. We must come to realize this fact and accept the process by which we can become acceptable to God. We have to change from doing things our own way to acknowledging God, His will and His laws in our lives. This means a desire to change our very hearts and minds. We have to turn from our way of lust, greed, selfishness and self-centeredness to God's way of mercy, generosity, love and outgoing concern for others (Eph. 4:22-24). We can view this as a spiritual "mind transplant." We have to adopt new ways of thinking, new feelings and attitudes (2 Cor. 5:17). Repentance, however, is not designed to create total uniformity of personality, tastes, interests, life styles, etc. among Christians. Such would be an anathema to God, who is creating true sons in His Family, not the proverbial "rows of yellow pencils." Repentance, in fact, is the means by which human beings can grow to have the same overall attitudes and character of God. This is the overwhelmingly uplifting result of godly sorrow.

Paul lists seven attributes of this godly sorrow. "For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment.' At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter" (2 Cor. 7:11). This type of sorrow generates real repentance which in turn will lead to salvation.

Real repentance is a spiritual gift, and only God can give it. Human remorsefulness, even accompanied by great emotion, is not the repentance that the Bible says is a

prerequisite for baptism and salvation. Consequently, an individual desiring to be converted must ask God for a repentant attitude of mind as well as for forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. This conscious act of asking God is an essential part*of the process.

As is commonly known, true repentance must be followed by water baptism, which results in the forgiveness of one's sins by God and the consequent reception of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands of the ministry.

Although one's initial act of repentance occurs prior to baptism, repentance is not a one-time event—it must be a continuous lifelong process. The more one learns about God and His ways, the more one becomes aware of how far he must go to be like God. As a converted individual seeks God's way and reads God's Word to receive personal correction, so his inner sinful attitudes and motivations are perceived. This continuous process of growth and change is the very essence of the Christian life. As God opens his mind to see more clearly (even more than before baptism) his sinful nature, the Christian repents more and more deeply. His post-conversion repentance is a continuous reaffirmation of his commitment to live God's way as well as being contrite and remorseful for any errors made.

Repentance is not synonymous with perfection. A repentant person is not guaranteed a sinless life for ever after. Even a converted person will sin out of weakness from time to time, but he need only repent of that sin and confess it before God, acknowledging Christ's atoning sacrifice once again, in order to restore contact with God and to obtain God's full forgiveness which re-establishes the joy of righteousness. Such a repentant person knows that God shall completely forgive all his sins upon repentance. He knows that God has willed to actually forget all our iniquities once they have been repented of and put under Christ's blood. God can no longer even remember our sins.' "... as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103: 12). This is the incredible promise of real repentance—real freedom: freedom from guilt and fear, freedom from anxiety and depression, freedom from sins, freedom from eternal death. It is the reason why true repentance is the most encouraging, beneficial gift God can give us. It is with this confidence that the Christian continues to suppress and overcome his human nature with God's help. He asks God to replace his ungodly thoughts with the godly

approach of the Holy Spirit; he seeks to diligently understand God's law more and more through the practical experience of obedience.

God does warn—and it should not be taken lightly— that "it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt" (Heb. 6:4-6). This shows that any who willfully reject God by adamantly refusing to follow His way cannot be coerced into repentance and cannot be forced to receive eternal life. Yet, diametrically contradicting the alien concept of a harsh, vengeful God is the astounding, thrilling, clarion-call truth of the Bible that all who want to repent can repent—at any time, for any sin, with the full assurance of God's total and immediate forgiveness through Jesus Christ our Savior. God does not want any human being to perish "but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9)..

In summary, repentance involves a change of one's whole way of life and frame of mind from disobedience and antagonism toward God to obedience and love toward God. It is the bridge that takes one from worldliness to godliness, from wickedness to uprightness, from the way of "get" (selfishness, self-concern, vanity) to the way of "give" (selflessness, outgoing concern, service). All this is only possible through God's Holy Spirit. Already working in the lives of thousands, God's gift of repentance is a great miracle that shall eventually work in the lives of billions.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

BAPTISMS

Doctrinal Statement

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

DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The New Testament places great stress upon the ceremony and symbolism of water baptism. It is a deeply meaningful initiatory rite referred to in Hebrews 6:1 as one of the foundational doctrines of Christian belief. John the Baptist is the one who introduced water baptism as a ceremony through which one outwardly demonstrates his inward attitude of repentance and his desire to submit to God.*

Christ placed His stamp Of approval upon John's baptism and set the example for us by Himself undergoing the ritual (Mt. 3:13-17). The Father likewise expressed His favor with Jesus' baptism by saying through an angel immediately afterwards that Jesus was his beloved son in whom he was "well pleased" (v. 17). Jesus' disciples continued to baptize in a similar manner to John until the death and resurrection of their master, when the practice took on newer and deeper significance. (John's baptism did not make available the Holy Spirit. Later we have an example which shows the necessity of rebaptism in the name of Jesus for some who had undergone only the baptism of John—Acts 19:1-6.)

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus commanded that the apostles go into all nations preaching the gospel and baptizing the disciples. They followed Christ's command and themselves both stressed the importance Of baptism and carefully explained its meaning in their preaching and teachings. Acts 2:38 is a fundamental scriptures in this regard: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." This

*We know that at a later time baptism accompanied circumcision as a means of entry into Judaism for the proselyte. This rite was possibly but not certainly pre-Christian, so that its relationship to Christian baptism is debatable.

