

Zion Assembly Church of God



Abstract of Faith

ABSTRACT OF FAITH

Note: The following has been accepted by the General Assembly in proper order; that is, by agreement in one accord.

Introduction

Zion Assembly is a Spirit-filled body of believers who have covenanted themselves together with God to accept and obey the teachings of Christ and His apostles (Ex. 19.3-6; Jn. 14.6, 8; Acts 2.42; Eph. 5.24-32). This commitment is firm, even in this present time of apostasy, when so many are *“falling away”* and *“[departing] from the faith”* (2 Thess. 2.1-12; 1 Tim. 4.1-3; 2 Pet. 2; 3.1-12; Jude 3-19).

The ministers and members of Zion Assembly have committed themselves to live and worship together in this *“most holy faith,”* to walk in truth, to *“endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,”* and to cultivate among themselves the graces of love and holiness. They seek for the perfections of Christ in their fellowship, and by His grace and power to conform to the image of Jesus Christ so completely that when He appears they shall be like Him (Rom. 8.29; Col. 1.1-17; 1 Jn. 3.2).

Besides this internal disposition to cultivate mutual love and care within the household of God, the ministers and members have committed themselves to labor for the unity of all believers, until all *“see eye to eye,” “speak the same thing,” “walk by the same rule”* (Is. 52.8; 1 Cor. 1.10; Phil. 3.16). In this manner, they seek to carry forward the apostolic vision: *“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph. 4.13).

Zion Assembly has further obligated itself to publish and to proclaim the full Gospel into all the world in obedience to Christ’s commission to the church (Mt. 28.19).

Church Membership

Membership in Zion Assembly is open to all believers whose testimony is evidenced by the fruit of the new birth, and who are willing to covenant themselves together with Christ and the church to walk in

the light of the Gospel. Candidates become members by the following solemn obligation:

Will you sincerely promise in the presence of God and these witnesses, that you will accept this Bible as the Word of God, believe and practice its teachings rightly divided, with the New Testament as your rule of faith and practice, government and discipline, and agree to walk together as one body in the light of the Gospel to the best of your knowledge and ability?

In response to this covenant formula the candidate answers, “I will by the grace of God.” The minister then lays hands on the new member and offers prayer for divine guidance and strength; the congregation follows with an affectionate welcome and extends the right hand of fellowship.

Prominent Teachings in the Scriptures

Note: *The following statements are not meant to form a creed, or to be thought of as an exhaustive statement of beliefs upon which the church is built. They are simply an abstract of some of the important and fundamental teachings and principles set forth in the Holy Scriptures, which form an essential part of the church’s Rule of Faith.*

The Trinity—The Bible teaches that the one eternal God exists in three persons: namely, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These Three have distinct identities, yet they form one undivided Godhead, subsisting in the same nature (Rom. 5.5; 15.16, 30; 2 Cor. 1.20; 5.19; Jn. 3.5; Eph. 2.18; Titus 3.5). The Father is God (Eph. 4.6), the Son is God (Jn. 1.1-3; 10.30; Heb. 1.8; Rev. 1.8), the Holy Spirit is God (Jn. 14.17; 16.13; Acts 5.3; 1 Cor. 2.10), yet there are not three Gods, but one God (Deut. 6.4). The three persons of the divine Trinity work together in perfect unity for the salvation of man (Jn. 3.5; 6.44; 14.6, 16-17; 2 Cor. 5.19).

Jesus Christ—Jesus Christ is the “*image of the invisible God*” (Col. 1.15), and God’s “*only begotten Son*” (Jn. 3.16). Through Him, God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received into glory, and now sits

on the right hand of God to make intercession for us (Acts 7.55; 1 Tim. 3.16). Through Him alone men have access unto the heavenly Father. It is through His sacrificial and atoning death on the cross that we are saved. *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4.12). He is the spotless *“Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”* (Jn. 1.29). He is also the head of the church and the savior of the body (Eph. 5.23).

Angels—The word angel means *“messenger.”* Scripture teaches that angels are heavenly and supernatural beings, but also they are creatures (Col. 1.16; 1 Pet. 3.32). As such, they were created to worship God and do His bidding (Is. 6.3; Mt. 26.53; Heb. 1.6-7, 14; Rev. 4.8). Their nature is incorporeal; they are *“spirits”* (Heb. 1.14), created holy and with free will. As such, some fell from their *“estate”* (Jude 6). In regard to the time of their creation, we are not informed explicitly in Scripture, but a few passages indicate that they were created before man and were present when God created man (Gen. 3.1; Job 38.7). In their role as *“messengers,”* they have been commissioned by God to minister in the affairs of man (Heb. 1.13-14; Ps. 34.7). They exist in ordered ranks—*“principalities,” “powers,” “thrones,” “dominions”* (Eph. 6.12; Col. 2.15), and also as *“seraphim”* and *“cherubim.”* The distinctions between seraphim and cherubim are not made clear in Scripture (Gen. 3.24; Ezek. 10.1-3, 7-14; Is. 6.2, 6).

The *“messenger ministry”* of angels can be seen both in the Old and New Testaments (Judg. 6.11; 13.3; 1 Kgs. 19.5; Psalm 91.11; Lk. 1.11; Mt. 1.20; 4.11; 28.5). The Bible reveals that angels are great in number (Deut. 33.2; Dan. 7.10; Mt. 26.53; Lk. 2.13; Rev. 5.11) and have great power, intelligence, and supernatural ability to move with great speed. As such, man is said to have been *“made a little lower than the angels”* (Psalm 8.5). Notwithstanding, though angels are powerful, highly intelligent, and have great mobility, they are not all-powerful, all-knowing, nor omnipresent. (For example, they do not know when the Rapture will take place (Mt. 24.36).

As created beings, angels have a beginning, but they never die nor cease to exist (Lk. 20.36). Angels are not God or gods, and thus man is forbidden to worship them (Col. 2.18). In fact, the holy angels themselves [those who did not join in Satan’s fall and rebellion] reject any attempt by man to worship them (Rev. 19.10; 22.28).

Angels cannot repent nor be redeemed from sin, and thus the fallen angels are doomed forever to damnation. Nor do angels act as Gospel evangelists in the work of salvation, this ministry being assigned to born-again believers and more especially to the church (Acts 10.3-6). Yet angels assist the church in its mission (Acts 10.3-7; 11.13-14; 8.26; 5.19-20; Heb. 1.14). Jesus informs us also that the holy angels rejoice at the redemption of sinners (Lk. 15.10).

Scripture teaches that one-third of the angels followed Satan in a great rebellion against God (Is. 14.12-15; Rev. 12.4, 7-9), and that they labor in this present age under Satan's rule to "*steal, and to kill, and to destroy*" (Jn. 10.10; Eph. 6.10-12). These fallen angels are referred to as "*evil spirits,*" "*unclean spirits,*" and "*demons,*" and thus Jesus spoke of "*the devil and his angels*" (Mt. 25.41; see also Rev. 12.7). They have been sentenced to a realm of darkness, and live with the dread of their final judgment in the Lake of Fire (Jude 6; Mt. 25.41; 8.29).

Unlike Adam and the human race, angels were not created as a race, and therefore when one-third of the angels fell under Satan's deception, all the angels did not fall with them. Each was created separately, and each fell by his free choice independently. Nor did Satan transmit his sin to the other angels; but rather deceived one-third of the angels into a rebellion against God; thus each angel sinned of his own volition. Further, unlike the human race, angels do not have sexual desires and do not procreate or reproduce (Mt. 22.30); neither were angels created, like man, male and female; and thus no angel in Holy Scripture is referred to as being female. It is important to understand also that Satan is not the God-ordained head of angels, but rather he assumed his position by deception and in rebellion against the will of God.

Finally, though men are clothed with heavenly bodies in glorification (1 Cor. 15.48-53) and in that glorious state share some angelic characteristics (Lk. 24.34-36), yet they do not become angels. The distinctions between men and angels will remain throughout eternity (Rev. 5.9-13).

The Bible—The Holy Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, reveal God and His will for man. They are inspired, inerrant, infallible, and unchangeable (2 Tim. 3.14-16; 2 Pet. 1.16-21). The truths of the Scriptures are revealed by prophecy, type, precept, and example, illuminated through the power of the Holy Spirit. The teachings of the Bible, particularly in the light of the New Testament, are the church's final rule for faith,

practice, government, and discipline (Acts 2.42; 2 Pet. 3.1-2). Walking in the light of God's Word is the guiding principle and commitment of Zion Assembly: *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path"* (Psalm 119.105).

The Church is a visible body of believers formed and incorporated by covenant with God to keep His commandments (Ex. 19.5-8; 24.3-8; Ps. 119.57; Jn. 14.15; 17.6, 8, 14; 1 Pet. 2.9). It is theocratic in form and function, providing order and government through the Spirit and the Scriptures for God's people (Is. 2.2-4; 9.7; Mt. 18.15-20; 1 Cor. 12.28). The church is presently imperfect, spotted with backsliders and *"false brethren"* (1 Cor. 5.1-13; Gal. 2.4; Jude 4). It is thus distinguished from the kingdom of God, the latter being the spiritual realm of all born again believers (Jn. 3.3-8; Rom. 14.17; Col. 1.13). One is *"born"* into the kingdom; he/she is *"added to the church"* (Jn. 3.3-8; Acts 2.47). The church will succeed to proclaim the Gospel into all the world (Mt. 24.14; 28.18-20; Mk. 16.15-16); will be perfected *"with the washing of water by the word,"* and will be presented to Christ glorious in holiness (Eph. 5.26-27). The General Assembly is the highest tribunal of authority in the church for the interpretation of the Scriptures (Acts 15; 1-16.4-5). The purpose of the General Assembly is to promote unity and fellowship among the saints, to search the Scriptures for additional light and understanding, and to resolve differences in interpretations which tend to be divisive among the ministers and churches. All matters of faith, government, and discipline are discussed before the entire body of the church assembled, and resolved in one accord with the manifest approval of the Spirit (vv. 12, 22, 28). This form and order is based on the precedent: *"For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us"* (Acts 15.28). All male members in good standing have an active voice in the Assembly. Women are a vital part of the church's life and ministry. In matters dealing with church authority, however, they voice their opinions through their husbands and/or church elders (1 Cor. 11.3, 7-9; 14.34-36; 1 Tim. 2.12; 3.1-17).

Man is unique in all of God's creation. Only he was created in God's image and likeness (Gen. 1.27; 5.2; Eccles. 7.29; 1 Cor. 11.7; Eph. 4.24), and therefore man has a unique relationship to God. His nature is composed of soul, spirit, and body (Job 32.8; Eccles. 12.7; Mt. 10.28; 1 Cor. 15.45; 1 Thess. 5.23; Heb. 4.12), though *"soul"* and *"spirit"* may be

fully distinguishable only by the Spirit of God (Heb. 4.12 and compare Jn. 12.27 and 13.21). Of all the living things on earth, only man has God-consciousness and an immortal soul (Gen. 2.7; 1 Cor. 15.45). He thus has an everlasting destiny in heaven or hell, with eternal life or everlasting death and damnation (Rom. 6.23; Rev. 20.4-6; 21.7-8). He was created by divine decree in one day; he did not therefore evolve, nor does he exist by chance. Moreover, the uniqueness of man is seen in that he was given authority in earth over all living things including animal life (Gen. 1.26, 28). This uniqueness is partly why the Psalmist exults, “*I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made*” (Ps. 139.14), and why he asks, “*What is man, that thou art mindful of him?*” (8.3-4; Heb. 2.6).

Man was created *male* and *female* (Gen. 1.27; 2.18, 21-25) in order that the genders might come together under divine institution as husband and wife (Gen. 2.21-25; Mk. 10.6-9) to procreate the race of man—to “*be fruitful, and multiply*” (v. 28; 9.1)—and to provide comfort and companionship for one another (Prov. 18.22; Eccles. 9.9; Eph. 5.22-25, 28-31; 1 Pet. 3.7). This is the divine order for man, making *fornication* (pre-marital sex, homosexuality, incest, bestiality) and *adultery* (unfaithfulness in marriage, and divorce and remarriage while one’s first companion is still living) vile corruptions of God’s expressed will and design for man (Mal. 2.14-16; Mt. 5.28; Mk. 10.7-12; Lk. 16.18; Rom. 7.2-3; 1 Cor. 7.10-11, 39).

Included in man’s God-consciousness is an innate sense of morality—of moral right and wrong—and a sense of accountability for his behavior (Acts 17.28-30; Rom. 1.19-20; Jn. 1.9). Moral responsibility and accountability are predicated on the nature of man’s God-consciousness and free will, that is, his ability to choose and act in obedience or disobedience to God’s revealed will (Josh. 24.15-25; 1 Kgs. 18.21; Ezek. 20.39; Lk. 13.35; Jn. 3.36; Rev. 22.17).

Man was created holy, in the moral image of God (Gen. 1.27, 31; 5.1-2), but his fall in Eden plunged him into sin and corruption. His fall was predicated on the fact that he has free will. Adam chose, under the influence of Satan’s seductive power working through Eve, to disobey God. Because man is a race, unlike the angels, sin was transmitted to all men through Adam’s transgression (Gen. 3.6; Rom. 5.12; 1 Cor. 15.21). His redemption and reconciliation to God was made possible by the sacrifice of Christ (Rom. 5.15-19).

Christ is the second man Adam (1 Cor. 15.22, 45). He is therefore called the Son of Man as well as the Son of God (Mt. 12.8; 16.13; Lk. 1.35; Jn. 1.14; Col. 1.15, 19; Heb. 1.8; Rev. 1.8). In Him God and man exist in one person (Jn. 1.1-3, 14; Phil. 2.5-8). The first Adam failed and plunged man into sin; the second man Adam, Christ, lived triumphantly over sin (2 Cor. 5.21; Heb. 4.15), making it possible for us also to triumph over sin and be saved (Is. 53.4-9; 2 Cor. 2.14; 1 Pet. 2.21-24). He that believes and repents and is born again shall be saved (Jn. 3.3-8, 16; 10.28). Christ is the perfect man, and all men can be made perfect in and through Him, our redeemer and sanctifier (Heb. 2.11; 10.10, 14; 13.12).

Sin is a real and expressed evil. It originated in Satan in heaven (Is. 14.12-14; Jn. 8.42; 1 Jn. 3.8; Rev. 12.7-9), and in man in the Garden Eden when Adam rebelled and transgressed against God's explicit command and ate of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3.6, 17). Sin is thus willful rebellion against the law of God (Ex. 35.19; Psalm 51.3; Heb. 4.7; 10.26; 13.18; 2 Pet. 3.5) It may be defined as *lawlessness* (Rom. 3.20; 4.15; 5.13; Gal. 3.19; 1 Tim. 1.9), *transgression* (Ps. 119.158; Eph. 2.1; 1 Jn. 3.4), *disobedience* (Rom. 8.7; Titus 1.16; 3.3; 1 Tim. 1.9; 1 Pet. 2.7-8), and *rebellion* (Psalm 78.8; Lam. 1.18; 3.14; Dan. 9.5). Sin exists also in unbelief (Jn. 3.18; Titus 1.15; 1 Jn. 2.22-24; Rev. 21.8).

Unlike the angels, mankind is a race; thus when the first man Adam sinned, sin was transmitted to all men through him (Rom. 5.12). All men are therefore born with the sin nature and therefore with the propensity to sin (Ps. 51.5; 58.3; Eph. 2.3; 1 Jn. 1.8). None are exempt, including Mary, the mother of Jesus. "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*" (Rom. 3.23).

Sin exists in two forms: **1**) in the very being of man, in his rebellious nature (Rom. 6.6; Eph. 2.3); **2**) in actual acts of transgression (Eph. 2.1; Col. 2.13). Sin is conceived in the heart and is expressed in thought (Gen. 6.5; Mt. 15.19), word (Mt. 5.22), and/or deed (Rom. 1.32).

Death and everlasting damnation is the penalty that God imposed upon mankind for sin (Rom. 6.23). The Good News is that the shedding of Jesus' blood, His death on the Cross, and His resurrection provided the remedy for sin (Rom. 5.15-19; Heb. 9.22). By grace, through faith in Christ, transgressions are forgiven and the "*old man*," the sin nature, is crucified.

In justification, actual transgressions are pardoned and washed away (Rom. 3.28-30; 5.1; Eph. 2.5; 13-18); in sanctification, the very nature of sin rooted in man's heart is uprooted and removed (Rom. 6.6; Gal. 2.20; 5.24; 6.14; Col. 3.3-10). The sanctified believer is thus made free from sin (Jn. 8.36).

Works of the Flesh—The “*works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like*” (Gal. 5.19-21). The apostle Paul sets forth three general categories of carnality [“*works of the flesh*”]: **1)** sensual and sexual sins, which include adultery, fornication, immorality, impurity, unfaithfulness, and lewdness of all kinds, which may be committed before and/or during marriage; **2)** sins of spiritual deception and demonic seduction through false religion, which include idolatry, witchcraft, sorcery, divination, necromancy, magic, enchantments, palm readings, superstitious rituals of paganism, and new age teachings and practices; **3)** sins that stem from a malicious and spiteful spirit, which include hatred, enmities, wrath, strife, jealousy, uncontrolled anger, murders [actual or harbored in the heart], bitter disputes, dissensions, factions, heresies, seditions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and ranting and rioting.

The list of the “*works of the flesh*” given by the apostle Paul in Gal. 5 is not a complete list of sins. There are many more subtle works of the flesh and of the spirit that are not so “*manifest*” or obvious, including greed, covetousness, stealing, extortion, gossip, slander, whisperings, and evil speaking. The apostle thus adds to his list of sins the words, “*and such like.*” His point in bringing these sins to the attention of the church and identifying them in particular is to make us more conscious of the destructive nature of sin and to set forth God's remedy for sin in Christ. Deliverance from the powerful works of the flesh cannot be obtained through the law and practices of religion but only “*through sanctification of the Spirit*” and the Word of God (Gal. 5.16-18, 24; 1 Thess. 5.23; 2 Thess. 2.13). The sanctifying power of Jesus' blood received by faith through the Holy Spirit is the remedy! The “*old man*” must be crucified in order for the believer to be made free from and victorious over sin (Jn. 8.36; Rom. 6.6; 8.1-6; Gal. 2.20; 5.24; 6.14; Eph. 4.22-24; Col. 2.11, 12). Further, the old man is kept crucified by our daily consecration and “*walk in the Spirit*” according to the Word of God (Gal. 5.16, 25; 2 Tim. 2.21-23).

Salvific Work of Grace

Conviction is a revelation to man by the Holy Ghost of the righteous judgment of God. Through conviction, unregenerated souls see themselves as sinners before God, experience guilt, and realize their separation from Him who is holy, just, and good (Is. 6.1; Jn. 6.44; Acts 2.37-38). True repentance can be made only through the work of the Spirit in conviction (Jn. 16.7-15; 1 Cor. 12.3; see also Jn. 8.32; 14.6).

Repentance is the act of confessing one's sins before God, being willing to forsake them and to turn to Christ with all of one's heart, mind, soul, and strength. True repentance can be made only in the spirit of "*godly sorrow*" (2 Cor. 7.9-10). Repentance is manifested by certain fruit "*meet for repentance*" (Mt. 3.8; Rom. 6.2). The act of repentance should be followed by water baptism [see page 19] (Mk. 1.4-5, 15; Lk. 13. 3; Acts 3.19; 5.30-31; 1 Jn. 1.9). Repentance is a prerequisite experience for justification.

Justification is the state of being void of offense toward God. It is made possible through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. It is the act of God in forgiving the transgressions of a penitent sinner. Justification is the result of repentance and faith (Rom. 8.1-2; 3.23-26; 1 Jn. 1.7). The genuinely justified person has "*peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Rom. 5.1-2). Justification signifies the pardon (forgiveness) aspect of the new birth.

Regeneration is the act of God in creating new life in the heart of the believer through the Holy Ghost. It is a definite and instantaneous experience. Man is dead in sins and trespasses through Adam and can be quickened or regenerated only through faith in Christ and His atoning sacrifice (Eph. 2.1, 4-5; Col. 2.13-14; Jn. 5.24). Regeneration is the same as the new birth. "*Born Again*" is another term for regeneration. The result of this experience is that the believer becomes a child of God. It is through this new birth that one becomes a part of the Kingdom of God. Jesus said: "*Ye must be born again*" (Jn. 3.3-8; 1 Pet. 1.23). The new birth is a prerequisite condition for the experience of sanctification.

Fruit of the Spirit is of divine origin. It is the very life of God poured into the heart of the regenerate believer. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (Gal. 5.22-23). We are admonished in the Scripture to walk in the Spirit and not to fulfill the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5.16; Eph. 5.9; Phil. 1.11).

Divine Healing is provided for all in the atonement. Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross provides healing for the whole man, including his body. Divine healing is effected by faith without the aid of medicine or surgical skills. In cases where one is healed through the assistance of physicians, medicine, herbs, etc., God is still to be praised: for it is God who heals in any case. "*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases*" (Psalm 103.2- 3; Is. 53.4-5; Mt. 8.17; 2 Pet. 2.24; Jas. 5.14-16).

Subsequent Grace

Sanctification is the second definite work of grace wrought in the regenerated heart by faith. In sanctification, the carnal nature is eradicated ("*the old man is crucified*") so that the believer no longer has the inclination or propensity to sin; that is, in sanctification the desire to sin is removed (Heb. 10.10; 13.12-13; Rom. 6.1-6; 1 Thess. 4.3; 2 Thess. 2.13; 1 Pet. 1.2). Sanctification enables the believer to bring his/her body under subjection to Christ, and to live a life consistent with the spirit of holiness and in accordance with the Word of God. Sanctification is a prerequisite condition for the baptism with the Holy Ghost.

Holiness is the result of sanctification. It is a state of grace and purity in which perfect Christlikeness is desired and pursued (Mt. 5.48; 2 Cor. 7.2). God has called us unto holiness (Thess. 4.7). "*Be ye holy; for I am holy*" (1 Pet. 1.15-16). "*Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*" (Heb. 12.14; see also Lk. 1.74-75; 2 Cor. 7.1; Titus 2.11-12; Eph. 1.4; 4.13, 24). Paul expressed his desire to "*present every man perfect in Christ Jesus*" (Col. 1.28). Christ is returning for a church that is glorious in holiness: "*without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing*" (Eph. 5.27; see also Ps. 45.9-13).

Christian Perfection—The perfection of the believer is the call and aim of the Gospel (Mt. 5.48; Jn. 8.36; 2 Cor. 13.11; Col. 1.22; Heb. 6.1; Jas. 1.4; Jude 24). Redemption anticipates purification and perfection, and this state of grace is to be attained “*in this present world*” (Titus 2.11-14). Christ gave His life and shed His blood to make believers perfect in Him (Heb. 10.1, 14; 13.21), both individually and corporately in the body of Christ (Mt. 5.48; Jn. 17.20-23; 2 Cor. 13.9; Col. 1.28; Eph. 1.10; 2.14-22; 4.11-16; 5.27; Rev. 19.7-8). This glorious experience has therefore been called “Christian perfection,” for it is attained in and through the grace of Christ by the Holy Spirit. The grace of perfection therefore glorifies God, not man.

Christian perfection is not the same as absolute perfection, for only God is absolutely perfect (Ex. 9.14; 1 Sam. 2.2; 1 Chron. 17.20; Job 11.7; Mk. 10.18). Thus Christian perfection is defined and explained in the Scriptures in ethical terms, rather than in legal terms; that is, Christian perfection is a state of grace attained through a perfect relationship with God. As such, it is rooted in and springs forth from “*perfect love*” (Mt. 5.44-48; 1 Cor. 13.1-13; 1 Jn. 2.5; 4.12, 17). Love is in fact the “*bond of perfectness*” (Col. 3.14). Christian perfection is therefore essentially grounded in love and wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit (1 Chron. 28.9; 2 Chron. 15.17; 16.9; 19.9; Rom. 5.5; Heb. 10.22). Accordingly, a believer may err in mental judgments, be forgetful, be sick or afflicted physically, have moments of anguish and perplexity, etc., and yet not be charged with sin or willful rebellion and disobedience against God’s will and law (Rom. 8.33; Eph. 4.26; Heb. 10.26). The human condition therefore does not necessarily militate against the saint’s perfect relationship with God and with his fellow man.

There is, moreover, growth in sanctification and in perfection unto a more glorious state of perfection in Christ. Thus the saint is transformed ever more perfectly by the Spirit of God into the image of Christ “*from glory to glory*” (2 Cor. 3.18). Sanctified believers are admonished to continue to “*perfect holiness in the fear of God*” (2 Cor. 7.1). The Good News is “*we know that, when [Christ] shall appear, we shall be like him*” (1 Jn. 3.2; Eph. 5.27).

Perseverance reveals the grace imparted to a believer to live in obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in spite of any opposition or hardship that may challenge his Christian faith (2 Tim. 2.3-4). Although the word “*perseverance*” is used only once in some translations of the

Bible (for example, Eph. 6.18 in the King James Version) there are many other words that are closely related to it, such as *abide* (Jn. 15.4-5, 7-9), *endure* (Mt. 10.22), *continue* (Jn. 8.31-32), *steadfast* (Heb. 3.14, 1 Pet. 5.8-9, 2 Pet. 3.17), *patience* (Lk. 21.19), *overcome* (Rev. 2.11, 17, 26; 3.5, 12, 21; 21.7). In each of these references, the words clearly imply a fight of faith for the follower of Christ. Therefore, perseverance is not an act of God for a believer, but the action of the believer in response to the command of Christ to continue in His Word and grace.

In considering perseverance, two questions immediately present themselves: 1) What is God's role? 2) What is man's role? Phil. 2.13 says that God works in us, both to will and to do His good pleasure). But how is this work accomplished in us? It is by His grace. Paul shows that it is by grace that our walk with Him begins (Eph. 2.8-9), and in another place this same grace teaches us that "*denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world,*" and to "*look for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ*" (Titus 2.11-13). Further, God's grace is able to keep us faultless with joy (Jude 24). It is important to understand, however, that man must respond in faith and accept the grace He has provided for him (Rom. 10.9-10). It is at the crisis moment of transforming faith that man begins his walk with God; but just as man turns to God for saving grace, he must also seek Him for sustaining grace (Mt. 7.7-11, 21-27; Lk. 8.15; 11.28; Jn. 14.15, 23; Jude 24). Man's perseverance depends on his continued desire to walk with the Lord (Jn. 8.31; Col. 1.23; Jude 21). This is shown further by the original New Testament word, *sozo*, that signifies "to save." This word is expressed in three tenses: "I am saved," "I am being saved," "I shall be saved." Thus, man must be willing to continue to "*press*" into the kingdom of God, and to persevere at all costs in order to be finally saved (Lk. 9.23; 16.16).

The commandment to *persevere—endure, abide*—in Christ carries eternal consequences. The inheritance of eternal life hinges on the Christian's decision to continue to seek the grace of God and to walk in obedience to His Word. We must be "*willing and obedient*" (Is. 1.19) and "*willing to live honestly*" (Heb. 13.18). According to the apostle John, if an individual does not remain in the doctrine of Christ, he does not have God, and he that does not have the Son of God does not have life (2 Jn. 9; 1 Jn. 5.12); therefore, the judgment for those who do not persevere is eternal damnation and separation from God (Mt. 25.41-46, Heb. 10.26-27).

Practical Graces

Restitution is the act of restoring something wrongfully taken, or the satisfying of one whom otherwise has been wronged (Mt. 3.8; Lk. 19.8-9). This act alone does not save, but it gives evidence of a heart that has truly repented. Restitution glorifies the grace of God and supports the testimony of the believer. It also gives opportunity to reconcile with those who have been wronged. It is the fulfillment of the law of love (Rom. 13.8). Some restitutions should be made only with great care and with pastoral guidance, in order to avoid further offense or injury.

Sabbath means rest. Observance of the Sabbath in the Old Testament (the seventh day) was instituted to point to the believer's spiritual rest in Christ under the New Covenant. The Old Testament requirement to keep the Sabbath holy is now superseded by the commandment: "*Be ye holy,*" for in Christ the believer is enabled and required to live holy every day. Sunday is not the Sabbath, but is a day set aside by the church to give special attention to the worship of God and the fellowship of the saints (Hos. 2.11; Col. 2.16-17; Rom. 14.5-6; Heb. 4.1-11).

Meats and Drinks—The prohibitions against certain meats and drinks in the Old Testament were not extended into the New Testament church. These ceremonial aspects of Mosaic legislation were "*nailed to the cross*" of Christ and done away with in the covenant of grace (Col. 2.13-17; Eph. 2.15; Heb. 9.8-11). What one eats and drinks (with the exception of intoxicating beverages) is now a matter of conscience, and does not violate the nature and principles of the kingdom of God (Rom. 14.17). However, one should be mindful of the Scriptural injunction: ". . . *whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*" (1 Cor. 10.31; see also: Rom. 14.2; 1 Cor. 8.8; 1 Tim. 4.1-5).

Tithing and Giving—Tithing is the giving of one tenth of one's increase to Christ, our High Priest. It began as a voluntary act with Abraham, was required under the Mosaic law, and carried forward by Christ as a discipline for the New Testament church (Mt. 23.23). Tithes are to be brought to the house of God and properly distributed by the ministers having charge of the treasury (Mal. 3.10). Freewill offerings are to be encouraged and regarded as a gift from the heart. Tithing and giving

into the church are part of God's plan to finance His work through the church on earth. We are required in the Scriptures to be good stewards of that which God has entrusted in our care (See also: Gen. 14.18-20; Lk. 11.42; 1 Cor. 16.2; 2 Cor. 9.6-9; Heb. 7.1-21).

Swearing and Profanity—Taking an oath is contrary to the spirit of the New Testament. *“But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation”* (Jas. 5.12). Jesus said, *“But I say unto you, Swear not at all...But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil”* (Mt. 5.34, 37; see also Ex. 20.7). An affirmation of the truth is sufficient; it is acceptable even in secular courts. Similarly, the use of profanity reflects an impure heart and has no place in the life of a child of God (Mt. 15.18-19; Phil. 1.27; 3.20; 1 Pet. 1.15; 2 Pet. 2.7; Jas. 3.8-10).

Intoxicating Beverages and Drugs—*“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise”* (Prov. 20.1). The Scriptures teach against the consumption of alcohol or other intoxicating beverages because God has called us to perfect sobriety (1 Pet. 5.8; 1 Thess. 5.6; Tim. 3.2; Titus 2.2). Believers are admonished not to *“ . . . give place to the devil.”* So-called moderate or social drinking certainly gives place to the adversary, and thus believers should totally abstain (Eph. 4. 27; see also: Is. 28.7; 1 Cor. 5.11; 6.10; Gal. 5.21). Much of what is said about intoxicating beverages is true also of drugs. The use of drugs such as tobacco, marijuana, opium, cocaine, etc., impair the body and is not in keeping with the teachings and principles of Christ and the Scriptures. These things defile the body and are inconsistent with God's call to soberness (2 Cor. 7.1; Is. 55.2; 1 Cor. 10.31-32; Eph. 5.3-8; Jas. 1.21). Drugs used for medical purposes should be taken only under the care and direction of a physician, and then only in good conscience.

Gambling (“Gaming”)—Zion Assembly is opposed to gambling in any form. Gambling brings with it a negative effect on society and is immoral (Ex. 20.17; 1 Tim. 6.9-10). This sin is associated with wasting time, money, and possessions. It also carries with it the stigma of greed and covetousness (see Ex. 20.17; Ps. 10.3; I Cor. 6.9-10;

Eph. 5.5; 1 Tim. 6.9-10; Heb. 13.5). Gambling of any kind (lotteries, casinos, sports betting, video poker, (slot) machines, on-line gambling, bingo, etc.) is denounced in principle throughout Scripture. It is also addictive, leads to increased crime, and often destroys marriages and homes.

Unequal Yoke—The Bible teaches against the children of God being unequally yoked with unbelievers. Binding ourselves with unbelievers in organizations and secret orders with an oath is contrary to the Spirit of Christ and the plain teaching in the Scriptures (1 Cor. 6.14-17). As the espoused bride of Christ, we have covenanted ourselves to give undivided loyalty to Christ. *“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”* (2 Cor. 11.2; Jer. 50.5). Membership in organizations which require an oath of secrecy should be dissolved before becoming a member of the church. *“Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing”* (Jn. 18.20).

Spirit Baptism and Spiritual Gifts

Baptism with the Holy Ghost is an instantaneous experience wrought in the life of the believer subsequent to entire sanctification. In this baptism, Christ is the agent; the Spirit is the element (Mt. 3.11). The baptism with the Spirit on the sanctified life is accompanied with speaking in tongues: *“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”* (Acts 2.2-4; see also: 10.44-47; 19.1-6). The baptism with the Spirit is a baptism of spiritual empowerment for service in the kingdom of God (Lk. 24.49; Jn. 15.26; Acts 1.8); it also enables one to minister effectively within the church for the self-edification of the body (1 Cor. 12.12-28; Eph. 4.11-16).

Speaking in Tongues always accompanies the baptism with the Holy Ghost. The believer speaks in *“unknown tongues”* as *“the Spirit gives utterance”* (Acts 2.4). *“Unknown tongues”* is distinguished from *“divers tongues,”* that is, in languages that are known to man (Acts 2.6;

1 Cor. 12.10; 14.2). In either case, “*unknown tongues*” or languages known to man, and the manifestation of tongues and interpretations must always be consistent with the Word of God (1 Cor. 14.26). The gift of tongues is a sign to unbelievers (vv. 14.21-23), but serves also for the self-edification of the believer (v. 4).

Gifts Of The Spirit—There are various gifts and operations of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 12.4-11). The gifts of the Spirit were in operation in the New Testament church, but thereafter the church began to “*fall away*” and the manifestations of the spiritual gifts began to wane. After the apostasy in the fourth century, and the ensuing “*dark ages*” of Christian history, the manifestations of spiritual gifts (particularly tongues-speaking) were almost non-existent (manifested on occasion mainly among so-called heretics and unorthodox Christians). In these last days (particularly since early in the twentieth century) God is again pouring out His Spirit “*upon all flesh*” according to prophecy in order to fulfill His eternal purpose through the church (Joel 2.28-32; 3.16-18; Acts 2.38-39).

Signs Following Believers—Signs in the New Testament were mainly for the purpose of confirming the Word of God and Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. As believers went forth preaching the Word in Jesus’ name, the Lord worked with them and confirmed the Word with signs following (Mk. 16.15-20). Miraculous signs follow believers in order to confirm the proclamation of the Word of God, to convict sinners, and to edify the body of Christ (Mk. 16.17; 1 Cor. 12.12-31).

Ordinances

Water Baptism is the act of being immersed in water by the minister of the Gospel in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. It is commanded by Christ and represents His death, burial and resurrection, which are experienced in the life of the believer (Rom. 6.3-5). This ordinance has no power to wash away sin, but is the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Pet. 3.21). Water baptism is valid only when the candidate is actually born again (Mt. 28.19; Mk. 1.8-10; 16.15-16; Jn. 3.:22-23; Acts 10.47- 48; 16.3). Water baptism is identified with spiritual regeneration; it is not the door into the church.

Lord's Supper is a memorial meal, which calls to remembrance the sacrifice of Christ, who shed His blood for our sins. Jesus commanded that this sacred meal be observed "*in remembrance of me*" (1 Cor. 11.24). The broken, unleavened bread represents His body; the fruit of the vine (unfermented grape juice) represents His blood. This sacred ordinance should be observed with holy reverence, only after careful self-examination (1 Cor. 10. 16-17; 11.23-30). It is the outward sign of Christ's covenant with the church (Lk. 22.20).

Feet Washing is an ordinance in the church. Following the institution of the Lord's Supper, Christ girded himself with a towel, washed the disciples' feet, and said: "*If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet*" (Jn. 13.14). This ordinance is distinguished from the cultural practice of feet washing in the Middle East; it has spiritual significance and is commanded to be observed by believers (1 Tim. 5.10). The purpose of feet washing is not fulfilled through charity and good works. It is to remind us that we have one Master and Lord, who is the head of the church, and we are all His servants, and servants of one another.

Proclamation and Public Reading of the Word of God—The Bible, the written Word of God, is a visible sign and witness pointing men to the Gospel of Christ. The Bible is a sacred record or witness of Jesus' birth, death, resurrection, ascension, glorification, and on-going intercessory work in unity with the Father in His heavenly throne (Acts 7.55; Rev. 3.21). It is a written revelation of the saving work of God in Christ, and thus analogous to God's Word inbreathed into the hearts of believers.

God's church is bound by a sacred covenant to read, study, and obey the Word of God. Each member is to read, hear, believe, receive, search, study, and obey the Word of God. The church is to proclaim "*all the counsel of God*" (Acts 20.27), teach believers in all nations "*to observe all things whatsoever that [Christ has commanded]*" (Mt. 28.19-20, and to "*rightly divide the word of truth.*" (2 Tim. 2.15).

The public reading of the Word of God is pure proclamation, allowing the Word to speak for itself. The Reading of Holy Scriptures is commanded and encouraged in both Old and New Testaments, and otherwise taught by precept and example by Christ, the apostles, and prophets.

The practice of the proclamation and public reading of the Bible demonstrates a sober reverence for the written Word of God. In an age in which the majority of professing Christians are biblically illiterate and falling away from confidence in the Bible as God's infallible Word written in Scripture, and consequently from serious Bible reading the study, God's church stands out like a "*city set on a hill*" holding forth the light of His Word!

The proclamation and public reading of the Word of God serves to reveal the mind of God; aids in personal and corporate cleansing of the believer; edifies the believer; comforts the believer; and encourages and strengthens corporate unity among believers. Where observed with sobriety, sincerity, and gravity the "Proclamation and Public Reading of Scripture" can produce revival, restoration, and reconciliation (Ex. 24.7-8; Josh. 8.34-35; 2 Kgs. 23.1-20; Neh. 8.1-8, 14-18; 2 Cor. 5.18-20). As such, proclamation, public reading, and responsive readings of the Sacred Scriptures bear all the marks of an ordinance, and thus should be observed as a divine order of worship, ministry, and theocratic administration.

Ministry / Ordination—The church recognizes the ordination and function of the ministry as an ordinance of God placed in the church to reveal Christ and demonstrate spiritual truth. Much like "Water Baptism," the act of "*laying on of hands*" for ordination is the church acting instrumentally to physically demonstrate God's spiritual calling and appointment of an individual as a servant leader in God's church. By acting instrumentally under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to ordain ministers, the church also reveals and demonstrates true theocracy.

Not only does the act of ordination demonstrate a spiritual truth, but the function of ministry has been ordained by God to serve as a revelation of Christ and His ministry to the world. Christ is the "Great Shepherd" (pastor) who lovingly oversees His flock (1 Pet. 5.1-4). He is the ultimate servant minister who came to "*serve*" (minister) and to be "*served*" (ministered to) (Mt. 20.28; Philem. 2.5-8). Christ has established and ordained the ministry to mirror and reveal His ministry. As the minister serves the flock, tends the flock, watches over the flock, and gives his life for the flock, the minister visibly demonstrates the heart and work of Christ. The membership practices this ordination and aids in this revelation by honoring the ministry and willingly submitting to those who have the rule over them (Heb. 13.7, 17) thus

demonstrating the Christian's honor of God and submission to God's government (Col. 3.23-24; Eph. 5.22).

The Church is a divine institution and **bears all the marks** of an ordinance. It has been ordained by God to be the *"light of the world, a city set upon an hill"* (Mt. 5.14). As such it is designed to be the sacred embodiment of truth symbolizing and declaring the mysteries of God to the world through the power of the Holy Ghost. It is the *"Body of Christ and members in particular"* (1 Cor. 12.27) all working together to be the physical representation of Christ in the world. It is the *"house of God,"* (1 Tim. 3.15) the *"temple of God"* (Eph. 2.21; 1 Cor. 3.16) consisting of *"living stones"* (1 Pet. 2.5) *"fitly framed together and builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit"* (Eph. 2.21-22). By *"binding and loosing on earth what has been bound and loosed in Heaven"* (Mt. 16.19), the church serves as a revelation of both the invisible God and His invisible Kingdom. The church preaches the Gospel, teaches the doctrine, lives the truth, practices government, submission, and discipline. The church embodies the Gospel for it consists of members who act as witnesses of the transforming power of Christ and His Gospel. *"But ye are a chosen generations, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light..."* (1 Pet. 2.9). As such, the church serves as an ordinance. In fact, it is the ordinance which embodies and practices all the other ordinances.

Marriage is defined by God as a covenant between an eligible male and eligible female to become husband and wife and it is for life; as such it is a divine institution that should be held in the highest esteem among all men and women. The ordinance of marriage was instituted by God, reaffirmed by Christ, and given further emphasis and clarity by the apostles, and accordingly, practiced by the New Testament churches.

The first marriage ceremony was administered by God after the creation of man. Thus, marriage is the Genesis ordinance, the original ordinance. Marriage is an ordinance in that it acts as a universal witness of God's divine order for the human race (Mal. 2.14-16; Mt. 19.4-5; 1 Cor. 7.2-5, 14; Heb. 13.4; Eph. 5.22-32; Rev. 19.7-8). It is also a channel through which the human race, and more particularly the church of God, is divinely ordered and sustained in holiness and truth. (Mk. 10.6-9;

1 Cor. 7.14-16; Eph. 5.22-32). Perhaps most importantly, the ordinance of marriage is a symbol of salvation and the sacred union between God and His people as bridegroom and bride (Ex. 19.5; Song 5.1; 6.2-9; Is. 49.14-18; 62.5; Ezek. 16.8; Jn. 3.29; Mt. 22.2; 2 Cor. 11.2-3; Eph. 5.25-32; Rev. 19.7-8). Thus, God repeatedly uses marriage terms to explain His relationship with the church, a relationship which culminates in the Bridegroom coming to take His bride to the Father's house for the marriage supper (Rev. 19.7; Eph. 5.25-27; Jn. 14.1-3; Mt. 25.1-10).

The members of the church aid in and practice this ordinance by reflecting Christ and the church through their marriage relationships. The husband loves the wife and gives himself for her (Eph. 5.25-29) while the wife loves her husband and submits to his loving authority (Eph. 5.22-24).

Divine Sanctities

Sanctity of Life—Human life is sacred because it is created in the image of God (Gen. 1.27). Taking of innocent life is thus strictly forbidden in Scripture, including abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, genocide, and suicide (self-murder). *“Thou shalt not kill”* (Ex. 20.13). Whosoever sheddeth innocent blood will not be held guiltless before God (Gen. 9.6; Num. 35.30-31; Rom. 13.8-10; Rev. 21.8).

Sanctity of Marriage—Jesus said, “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh: Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mt. 19:4-6). Accordingly, marriage is a divine institution between a male and female until death (Mk. 10.2-12; Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7.39) and as such it should be held in the highest esteem among all men and women.

Marriage is for life, and therefore divorce for any reason, including unfaithfulness, cannot dissolve a marriage. (The “exception” to this rule mentioned in Mt. 5.32 and 19.9 will be explained below). Thus remarriage after a divorce (while the first companion is still living) constitutes the sin of adultery (see Lk. 16.18; Ex. 20:14, 17; Mal. 2.14-17; 1 Cor. 5.1-5; 6: 15-20; 7.2, 3).

While the Bible commends marriage, and sex within marriage, it clearly condemns sex before or outside of marriage (Heb. 13.4). This condemnation includes sexual relations which might occur between a couple while “living together” or “cohabitating” in a non-married state (see 1 Cor. 5.1- 5; 6. 15-20; 7.2, 3).

Marriage is between one man and one woman for life; therefore sexual relations are lawful only within a God-ordained and biblically recognized marriage. Adultery (which includes remarriage while one’s first companion is still living), polygamy, and fornication (which includes pre-marital sex and cohabitation) are therefore sinful practices that violate the law of God, and injure the home and family.

The meaning of the word fornication has been the subject of much debate. Fornication is sometimes used in Scripture in a broad sense to include all forms of sexual immorality. However, when fornication and adultery are used in the same text, fornication usually refers to unlawful sexual relations before a person has been joined in a biblical, covenant marriage. This is certainly the case in Mt. 5.32 and 19.9. In these references, fornication signified unlawful sexual relations during the ancient, Jewish betrothal period—that is, before the betrothed couple had consummated their marriage (confer Mt.1.18-25). Fornication in this context would include also, however, a single person who has married someone else’s companion, that is, a divorced person. And it would apply also to an incestuous relationship—a sin of which the believers in Jesus’ day were well aware (1 Cor. 5.1-9; Leviticus 18.6-20; see also Acts 15.29, for the reference here by the Jerusalem council seems to indicate this kind of fornication).

In any case, fornication includes a single person who has been joined to another unlawfully in marriage. This was the gross form of fornication in the Corinthian church that Paul so boldly reproved, and for which cause he demanded that the church withdraw fellowship from the violator—“To deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5.1-9). It was in this context also that the apostle commanded that in order to avoid the sin of fornication, “*let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband*” (1 Cor.7.2; see also Mk. 6.16-18; 1 Cor. 5.1). In Gal. 5.19, both adultery and fornication are listed as works of the flesh, and the apostle solemnly warns that “*they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*” For these reasons, those who are entangled in these sins and unlawful marriages are not eligible

for membership in the Lord's church (confer 1 Jn. 3.7-10; 1 Cor. 5.11; 6.9-10).

Sanctity of the Body—Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and we are admonished to glorify God in our body (1 Cor. 6.20-21). “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy” (3.16-17). We are also admonished to present our bodies “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Rom. 12.1), and “ . . . whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10.31b). Incest, same sex unions, and all homosexual and lesbian relationships are strictly forbidden by the Scriptures. These practices are an abomination to God, though they may be sanctioned by a state or religious institution (Rom. 1.24-28; Lev. 18.22-23; 20.10-21). Practices such as “body piercing,” tattooing, mutilating and disfiguring the body are of pagan origin and contrary to the spirit of holiness and biblical principles. These practices should have no place in the lives of believers (cf: Tim. 2.8-10; Rom. 12.1-2; Is. 3.16-22; 1 Jn. 2.15-17).

Eschatology

Scenario of Endtime Events

Rapture and Pre-Millennial Second Coming Of Jesus—Christ is coming again in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Mt. 24.27-28). “*The dead in Christ shall rise first, then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord*” (1 Thess. 4.16-18; see also 1 Cor. 15.51-52). All who are caught up in the first resurrection will attend the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19.7-9). Christ will then return to earth and reign with the saints for a thousand years (vv. 4, 6; see also Zech. 14.4-5; 1 Thess. 4.14; Jude 14-15; Rev. 5.10; 19.11-21).

Resurrection—There will be a resurrection for both the righteous and the wicked. The righteous will be raised at Christ's first appearance in the clouds of glory. The resurrection of the wicked will occur after the thousand years reign of Christ on earth. “*And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust*” (Acts 24.15; see also Dan. 12.2; Rev. 20.4-6; Jn. 5.28-29; 1 Cor. 15.12-23, 41-58).

Eternal Life for the Righteous—The reward of the righteous is everlasting life in the presence of God. “*And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal*” (Mt. 25.46; Lk. 18.29, 30; Jn. 10.28; Rom. 6.22; 1 Jn. 5.11-13)

Eternal Punishment for the Wicked—Those who reject or disregard the call to repentance and salvation are doomed to eternal damnation (Jn. 3.15-21). In hell there is no escape, no liberation, no annihilation. Hell is “*the second death,*” and is a place of eternal torment. “*But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death*” (Rev. 21.8; see also: 20.10-15; 2 Thess. 1.7-10; Jude 14, 15; Mt. 25.46; Mk. 3.29).

Antichrist—Antichrist can signify either “against Christ” or “in the place of Christ,” or a combination of the two meanings. Antichrist is one who opposes Christ or who assumes the prerogatives of Christ as our Lord and Savior.

While only the apostle John uses the word, antichrist, the apostle Paul is apparently speaking of the same spirit and principle when he refers to the “mystery of lawlessness” and the “lawless one” in 2 Thess. 2.3, 8. John identifies certain “*false prophets*” and “*deceivers*” as antichrists (1 Jn. 4.1-3; 2.18; 2 Jn. 7). The prophet Daniel is in reference to this same spirit in his prophecy of the “*beast*” in Dan. 7, which corresponds with John’s vision of the “*beast*” in Rev., chapters 11; 13; 17; 19.

We may conclude then that the spirit of antichrist signifies the deceptive and seductive spirit in the world that seeks to confuse the true identity of Christ and to corrupt His Gospel. Antichrist may take many religious, social, and political forms, but all have the same goal—namely, to compromise and corrupt the true doctrine of salvation in Jesus Christ with false doctrines and the pretense of false Christs (Mt. 24.4-5, 11, 23, 24).

Prophecy predicts that a particular person in the very last days will come on the scene that will embody and personify the spirit of antichrist in the world. This man is variously characterized as the “*lawless one*” (2 Thess. 2.3, 8) and the “*beast*” (Dan. 7.10-11, 25; Rev. 13.1). Jesus is in reference to this spirit of deception and lawlessness in Mt. 24.5, 24 and Jn. 5.43. Our concern in the church, however, is not so much

with the coming of the particular Lawless One—“*the beast*”—but with the spirit of antichrist now prevailing in the world: for it seems that the prophetic Lawless One will not be fully revealed until after the rapture of the church (2 Thess. 2.7-8). Until then, the Spirit of God and the church will restrain and prevent his rise to power and his full revelation.

God’s church rests upon the Revelation—the “*rock*”—that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God (Mt. 16.13-18), and that He was incarnate in the virgin Mary, died for our sins, and was resurrected on the third day so that man can be redeemed and brought back into fellowship with God our Father (Rom. 5.6-10). The Spirit of Christ indwells believers, enabling them to live their lives consistent with the law of God (Rom. 8.1-7); whereas the spirit of antichrist opposes the truth of God revealed in the Holy Scriptures, providing substitutions for the saving grace of Christ. The diabolic influence of antichrist is found throughout the world, resisting the true Gospel and substituting in its place myriads of false gospels (Gal. 1.1-9; 2 Cor. 11.3-4). These are “*lying spirits*” set to deceive and destroy precious souls (2 Thess. 2.9; Rev. 13.13-14). John exhorts believers to “*try the spirits*”—test them, prove them—against the truth of Christ and His teachings revealed in the Scriptures (1 Jn. 4.1-3). The spirit of antichrist, personified in the Lawless One, will be completely destroyed with the brightness of Christ’s second coming and the power of His Word (2 Thess. 2.8). Meanwhile the saints are empowered to resist and overcome the spirit of antichrist in the world through faith, the Word of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Principles for Practical Christian Living and Discipline

The following guidelines are explicitly revealed in the Scriptures or else shown to be consistent with biblical teachings. They are brought to our attention to enhance our relationship with Christ and one another, and to encourage us to live in a way that will bring glory and honor to the name of Christ and to support the witness of the church. We are admonished in the Scriptures: “. . . *be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity*” (1 Tim. 4.12). Jesus instructs us: “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*” (Mt. 5.16).

Prayer—Jesus’ admonition to “*watch and pray*” (Mt. 26.41) has never been more urgent than today. We live in “*perilous times,*” and Christ and the apostles warned that the times will only worsen as we approach our Lord’s return. Therefore, daily prayers and family devotions should be a priority in every church home. Maintaining a prayerful attitude is a key to spirituality for every individual and local congregation. Again Jesus said, “*...men ought always to pray, and not to faint*” (Lk. 18.1), and the apostle encouraged believers to “*pray without ceasing*” (1 Thess. 5.17). We are also enjoined to “*... pray one for another . . .*” (Jas. 5.16a). Special prayers should be made for those in authority and for those who have given themselves in service to God and to the ministry of the Word (1 Tim. 2.1-3). Prayer is so essential to the life of the church that the church is called “*the house of prayer*” (Is. 56.7; Mt. 21.13).

Bible Study—Reading and studying the Scriptures are invaluable to the spiritual welfare of the child of God. Every member of the church is encouraged to be a faithful student of God’s holy Word. Paul instructs us to “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God . . .*” (2 Tim 2.15a), for “*the holy scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*” (3.15). Further, he says, “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*” (v.16). The importance of the Word of God is eloquently expressed by Psalmist: “*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*” And again, “*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee*” (Psalm 119.105, 11).

Church Attendance and Worship—Worship and fellowship with believers of “*like precious faith*” is a vital part of the Christian life. Worship should be heartfelt in the Spirit, and in harmony with the Word of God (Jn. 4.23; Eph. 5.19). Each member of the church is a part of the body of Christ, and thus the body will be hindered to the degree that one member fails to actively participate in its life and mission. Accordingly, members should actively support every function of the church, and participate as much as possible. The exhortation of the Hebrew writer is worthy of our careful attention: “*And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some; but exhorting one another: and so much more as we see the day approaching*” (Heb. 10.25). Children should be instructed at

home, and taught by precept and example to respect the house of God. Ministers and their families should be examples in their lifestyles and conversations. *“And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane”* (Ezek. 44.23). A prayerful attitude creates an atmosphere conducive for worship and the ministry of God’s Word. Believers should therefore be prayerful as the minister delivers the message, lest Satan come and steal the Word of God from their hearts (Mk. 4.4, 15). God’s love *“shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost”* should fill the atmosphere of our worship services. Love should govern our every action and be shown to everyone without partiality (1 Cor. 13). We should take special care to show love to visitors. Jesus said, *“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”* (Jn. 13.35).

Walking Circumspectly—Children of God should *“walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time for the days are evil”* (Eph. 5.15-16). Living a consecrated life at home and abroad will give no place for anyone to justly think or speak of you as a hypocrite. Our manner of life and conversation should be holy in word and deed, as becoming to a child of God. As representatives of Christ in this world, and members of the Church of God, we should fashion ourselves with modesty and sobriety (Ps. 1.1-3; Phil. 1.27; 1 Thess. 5.15-23).

Entertainment and Worldly Attractions—Christians should never participate in worldly attractions and entertainment where the principles of holiness may be compromised. Believers should participate in activities with unbelievers only with a guarded disposition, lest one becomes entangled or entrapped in the snares of Satan. *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet. 5.8; see also 2 Pet. 2.19-22).

Illicit Relationships—Paul admonishes us to *“give no place to the devil”* (Eph. 4.27). Forming too close an intimacy with the opposite sex, even if they are brothers and sisters in the Lord, creates an environment for temptation and gives opportunity for the *“wiles of the devil.”* Samson is a classic case of this unwise behavior, which led to his fall from grace (Judg. 16); whereas Joseph wisely fled from a similar situation (Gen. 39). Paul perhaps had Joseph in mind when he exhorted, *“Flee fornication”*

(1 Cor. 6.18). The words of James, the Lord's brother, also come to mind: "*Lust when it is conceived bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death*" (Jas. 1.13-15). In view of these solemn admonitions, great care should be taken to avoid associations and situations, which could reflect upon one's character and bring reproach upon Christ and the church.

Outward Adornment—Christians are both the servants and ambassadors of Jesus Christ. As His servants, our focus should always be to walk pleasing in His sight. God told Samuel ". . . *for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart*" (1 Sam. 16.7). As such, our primary focus should not be on adorning our outward person, but the "hidden man of the heart." We are informed that the character traits of the inner man—"modesty," "shamefacedness," "sobriety," and the "ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," etc., (1 Tim.2.9-10; 1 Pet. 3.3-4) are "*in the sight of God of great price.*"

At the same time, however, our outward appearance is viewed also by men and therefore the saints of God should reflect a Christ-like character and witness (2 Cor. 3.2-3; 5.20; 8.21). As ambassadors for Christ, we should dress in a manner which represents Christ and His values to the world. Those "*professing godliness*" should be holy in their appearance and should never adorn themselves in provocative, seductive, and gaudy clothing and/or cosmetics [lipsticks, eye shadows, etc.] which create a superficial beauty, and which tend to contradict and confuse the godly qualities of "lowliness," "wholesomeness," "holiness," "sobriety," "meekness," "gravity," "purity," and Christ-likeness. For the Lord "[*beautifies*] the meek with salvation" (Ps. 149.4).

To be sure, our primary and most important emphasis should be on manifesting the inner graces of the Spirit which result from the new birth—love, patience, faith, hope, godly contentment, peace, gentleness, meekness, mercy, sobriety, gravity, etc.; but we are admonished also to adorn the doctrine of God (Titus 2.10), which includes the outward signs of salvation—"lifting holy hands," "praying," "praise," "rejoicing" ["shouting," "clapping of the hands," etc.], "thankfulness," "good works," and a "meek and quiet spirit." Further, it must include also dressing in modest apparel, which logically precludes the wearing of jewelry, gold, pearls, and costly array (1Tim. 2.9-10; Titus 2.3, 10; 1 Pet. 3.3-5).

It is true that there are many references in the Old Testament that show that God's people under the Old Covenant adorned themselves with

jewels and precious stones. But as we move from the Old Testament to the New, we find that these ornaments of gold and silver and precious jewels were symbolic of the inward graces of salvation. Thus, the prophet Isaiah wrote, *“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels”* (Is. 61.10). In point of fact, the members of the church are themselves the “jewels” of God (Mal. 3.17). We should seek therefore to cultivate the inner light of the Holy Spirit in our lives, in order to be a “city set on a hill” to manifest the light and glory of God’s holiness before a watching world.

Both the inner graces of the indwelling Spirit and our modest outward dress and behavior give witness to the attributes and fruit of believers who have been transformed by the grace and power of Christ, and who have been informed in regard to His teachings and have fully committed themselves to reflect His holy image.

Corporate and Self-Discipline—Self-examinations to evaluate one’s own faith and spirituality are healthy (1 Cor. 11:28). Sincere concern for others is also good and to be encouraged. We are our brother’s keeper. Counsel should be given only in the spirit of love and with godly wisdom, and according to the rule of discipline outlined in the gospel (Mt. 18.15-20). (A harsh spirit of criticism is detrimental to the spiritual welfare of both the critic and the one receiving the criticism: Mt. 7.1-5; 2 Cor. 2.1-11; Gal. 5.14-15; Eph. 4.30-32). Discipline should be administered only as a last resort, and always through prayerful counsel and with the ultimate good of the erring brother/sister in mind (1 Cor. 5.1-7; Gal. 6.1-5).

—Notes—

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