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Bible Study #7: *The Church of Jesus Christ*

Introduction and Review

Dear friend,

We rejoice that we have been able to help you study the Bible through the materials that you have already completed, and are glad to be able to continue helping you learn with this seventh study. In our previous studies, we learned about the inspiration and preservation of the Bible, about the character of the one Triune God, and about the commands of God's Law, with its associated promises and punishments. We saw that we sinned in Adam, had a sinful nature, and had committed many sins, but that God provided salvation through the Person and work of Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. This good news, or gospel, brings us adoption, justification, reconciliation, sanctification, and glorification, when we receive it by repentant faith alone. Genuine repentance is *a change of mind about God and sin that results in a change of life.* We defined true faith as: *Believing to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word of God, saving faith receives, believes on, trusts in, and rests upon the Lord Jesus Christ for justification, sanctification, and eternal life.* One repents and believes in Jesus Christ at a particular moment in time, after which one is eternally secure. We saw that election, predestination, Christ's High Priestly ministry, the nature of justification, the fact that salvation is not by works, the seal of the Holy Spirit, and many plain promises guarantee that one who has come to Christ cannot by any means perish. This is an objective fact for all saints. God also wants His people to experience the joy of subjectively recognizing that they have been forgiven. In the book of 1 John, the Lord has given us seven marks of true salvation, so that those who have the marks may have certain confidence that they are indeed born of God. The seven marks

were the inability to live in continual sin, genuine faith in Jesus Christ, love for God and other true Christians, doing righteousness, continued belief and practice of true doctrine, the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and overcoming the world-system. Since God works these marks in all His people, those who have them belong to Him, while those who do not have these marks have never been born again. Having studied the security of salvation and the nature of assurance, we are now ready to look at the institution God has placed on the earth for His service and worship, the church.

With study #7 you have also received your completed version of study #6, which has been checked and graded. Please look over that study for corrections by your Bible teacher, especially on the quiz questions, and for comments, especially at the very end of the study, and in association with your comments on whether or not you have assurance of salvation. Also, please keep your completed studies available so that you can look back at them later. Remember that you can use the blank space at the end of the study to write down any questions that you have. Also, please use this space to provide us with the names and addresses of any friends or acquaintances of yours who would also be interested in studying the Bible, so that we can send these materials to them as well. Once again, this Bible course is provided to you courtesy of Bethel Baptist Church, 4905 Appian Way, El Sobrante, CA 94803, (510) 223-8721/ (510) 223-9550, www.pillarandground.org, betbapt@flash.net. Let us know if you would like a personal visit for Bible study, and feel free to visit us for Sunday school at 9:45 a.m., morning worship at 11:00 a.m., Sunday evening worship at 6:00 p.m., or Wednesday prayer and Bible study at 7:00 p.m. We are overjoyed that we can assist you in studying the Bible.

The Church:

Its Importance

Does it really matter if we faithfully worship and serve God as a member of His church? Scripture answers this question with a resounding *yes!* There are many reasons why we should view the church as exceedingly important. First, Ephesians 5:25 tells us that "Christ also __ __ __ __ __ the __ __ __ __ __ __, and __ __ __ __ himself for it." While Christ died for everyone in the world (Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2), He had His church in view in a special way. If our perfect Example, Jesus Christ, loved His church enough to die for it, should we not also have this passionate, sacrificial love for it? Second, God commands us to assemble in church. Hebrews 10:25 tells us not to be "forsaking the __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day [of Christ's return] approaching." The fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) also requires church attendance, as we saw when we studied the ten commandments in Bible study #3. In fact,

characteristically choosing to skip church is a sign that one is unconverted, as we learned from 1 John 2:19 in Bible study #6. Third, the church is the place where we can be built up in the faith under God-ordained leadership. The "overseers" are to "feed the church of God" spiritually (Acts 20:28), and "watch for [their] souls" (Hebrews 13:17). God gave the church officers (Ephesians 4:11) for "the __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ [the church, Ephesians 1:22-23]: Till we all come in the unity of the __ __ __ __ __, and of the __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we *henceforth* be no more __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every __ __ __ __ of __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may __ __ __ __ __ __ into him in all things, which is the __ __ __ __, *even* Christ" (Ephesians 4:12-15). Do you want to make progress in holiness? Do you want to understand the faith and believe right doctrine? Do you want to grow more like Christ, have Him as your Head, and pass from spiritual immaturity to spiritual adulthood? Then you need the church! Do you want to avoid being tossed to and fro by false teaching and false teachers? This protection from evil is found in the church. God did not design us to grow as Christians on our own. In fact, removal from church membership is called being "delivered unto Satan" (1 Timothy 1:20; 1 Corinthians 5:4-5; Matthew 18:15-20). It is not safe to be outside the church! Our Lord's way is for us to learn His Word and mature spiritually in "the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

The church is the place of the Savior's special presence. Christ walks in the midst of His churches (Revelation 1:12-13, 20). Three metaphors in Scripture illustrate this special presence. First, the church is "the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27; 1:2). This metaphor emphasizes the particular service each Christian has in his congregation as believers edify, serve, and help each other (1 Corinthians 12:13-27; Romans 12:1-16). It also emphasizes special closeness to Jesus Christ: in the church, "we are members of his __ __ __ __, of his __ __ __ __ __, and of his __ __ __ __ __" (Ephesians 5:30). If you are not a church member, you lose out on the special presence of your Redeemer. Second, the church is "an holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:21; 1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Chronicles 25:6; 1 Peter 2:5). The Spirit of God dwells in the church in a special way (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). Your prayer should be, "O God, thou *art* my God; early will I __ __ __ __ thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh __ __ __ __ __ __ __ for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To __ __ __ thy __ __ __ __ __ and thy __ __ __ __ __, so *as* I have seen thee in the __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __" (Psalm 63:1-2). Jehovah's spiritual power and glory are wonderfully revealed in His temple, His sanctuary for this age, the church. How could a believer abandon his Savior's temple? Third, the church is Christ's bride. In 2 Corinthians 11:2, Paul tells the church at Corinth, "I am jealous over you

with godly jealousy: for I have __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ [engaged] you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ." (Note also Ephesians 5:23-33.) The church is the special object of love to her spiritual Husband, the Lord Jesus Christ. She has a special closeness to Him, as a wife has a unique union with her husband. She is the object of His special care, watchfulness, protection, and affection. While every believer will, in eternity future, have the special closeness to Christ symbolized by the bridal relationship (Revelation 21:2; Romans 7:4), on the earth, only those who are part of the church have this union. Who would want to miss out on this?

This special closeness to Christ is found, before heaven, only in the church of God. It is not available by listening to Christian radio, TV preachers, or Internet sermons. It is not found through reading good Christian books. It is not found in a home Bible study group with a few friends. All of these other things can be spiritually beneficial (although there are so many very deceptive false teachers on the radio, TV, and Internet, as well as writing books, 2 Timothy 4:3-4, that you should avoid (Romans 16:17) the great majority of them, and be extremely cautious about the rest—you need the discernment you will only gain in a good congregation!), but they are no substitute for the only institution God has ordained for His work in this age, the church.

The Church:
Its Definition

What does the word *church* mean, anyway? It is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia,* which appears 115 times in the text of the New Testament.[1] In addition to being translated as *church,* it could be rendered as *assembly* or *congregation.* In the New Testament *ekklesia* is translated as *assembly* three times (Acts 19:32, 39, 41), and our English Bible has the word *congregation* where the Greek translation of the Old Testament has *ekklesia* (cf. Deuteronomy 23:1; 31:30). Outside of the Bible, the word *ekklesia* was in "common usage for several hundred years before the Christian era and was used to refer to an assembly of persons constituted by well-defined membership."[2] The Lord Jesus Christ called His congregation "<u>my</u> church"

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[1] The word appears in Matthew 16:18; 18:17; Acts 2:47; 5:11; 7:38; 8:1,3; 9:31; 11:22, 26; 12:1, 5; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3-4, 22, 41; 16:5; 18:22; 19:32, 39, 41; 20:17, 28; Romans 16:1, 4-5, 16, 23; 1Corinthians 1:2; 4:17; 6:4; 7:17; 10:32; 11:16, 18, 22; 12:28; 14:4-5, 12, 19, 23, 28, 33-35; 15:9; 16:1, 19; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 8:1, 18-19, 23-24; 11:8, 28; 12:13; Galatians 1:2, 13, 22; Ephesians 1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23-25, 27, 29, 32; Philippians 3:6; 4:15; Colossians 1:18, 24; 4:15-16; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 4; 1 Timothy 3:5, 15; 5:16; Philemon 2; Hebrews 2:12; 12:23; James 5:14; 3 John 6, 9-10; Revelation 1:4, 11, 20; 2:1, 7-8, 11-12, 17-18, 23, 29; 3:1, 6-7, 13-14, 22; 22:16.

[2] *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains,* Johannes P. Louw & Eugene A. Nida, New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1989.

(Matthew 16:18), to distinguish it from other types of assemblies or congregations. As we will see in greater detail as we proceed in this study, *the church of Christ is an assembly of baptized believers, organized to carry out the Lord's work.*

Many people today use the word *church* in senses that are entirely absent from the Bible. Some call the building where people meet for worship a *church*, but the word *ekklesia* does not designate the building, but the congregation, whether or not it meets in a church building. In the days of the apostles, there were few, if any, churches that had a building specifically constructed for their assemblies. People also use the word *church* to refer to a denomination; they speak of "the Methodist Church" or "the Catholic Church" or "the Baptist Church." However, an *ekklesia* is an assembly of people, not a denomination. There were no denominations in the first century, anyway—they developed later. There were only independent churches.

Many speak of the "Universal Church," which, although variously defined, often is said to consist of all believers in the whole world. Particular congregations are then said to be little parts of the one, great universal church made up of all the Christians on earth. However, in the Bible, the *church* or *ekklesia* never refers to all believers in the whole world. (You can look up all the references in the last footnote to see this for yourself.) The *family of God* is a universal, invisible entity that consists of all believers everywhere (Galatians 3:26), but a *church* is a particular, local, visible congregation. The metaphors for the church show that the idea of a universal or an invisible church is false. The church is Christ's body, His temple, and His bride. Bodies are very local and visible—a bunch of flesh and bones scattered around the globe is not a body. A temple is in one particular location, available for everyone to see; bricks scattered all over the place are not a building at all. And certainly every man on his wedding day rejoices that his bride is very local and visible, not invisible or cut into little pieces which are scattered all over the earth! Christ's church is not a building, a denomination, or something universal and invisible; it is a particular type of assembly. What is it that distinguishes Christ's assembly from all other assemblies?

The Church:
Its Marks

Different types of assemblies have different identifying marks. The distinguishing features of an assembly of baseball fans at a stadium, of an assembly of opera lovers at a music hall, and of an assembly of legislators in congress make them easy to tell apart. Likewise, the church of Christ has a number of marks that set it apart from all other assemblies. We will look at five of these marks. The Lord's church has the Bible for its sole authority, is a self-governing,

independent congregation, practices the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, is faithful to Biblical doctrine, and conforms to Biblical practices.

I. The Bible is the sole authority for faith and practice

2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that "__ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ *is* given by __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be __ __ __ __ __ __ __, throughly furnished unto all good works." The church of God accepts the Bible as the inspired Word of God. As we learned in study #1, every word of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is as much God's Word as if He spoke it audibly. "All" Scripture is given by "inspiration." Also, the church accepts the Bible as its only authority. Since Scripture is able to make us "perfect" and "throughly furnished," completely equipped, for "all" good works, the church neither needs nor accepts any other authority for its belief and practice. God has said, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish *ought* from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you" (Deuteronomy 4:2; cf. Deuteronomy 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; Matthew 15:3; Revelation 22:18-19). The Lord Jesus' church rejects the authority of human traditions, of other books that pretend be inspired and to add to or complete God's already perfect Word, and of human beings who claim to be infallible or to be prophets bringing new revelation. It follows the whole Bible, and only the Bible.

We also learned in Bible study #1 that God has preserved every word of the Scriptures. Recall that Psalm 12:6-7 promised, "The __ __ __ __ __ of the LORD *are* __ __ __ __ words: *as* silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt __ __ __ __ them, O LORD, thou shalt __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ them from this generation for ever." All of those preserved words would be available and in use by God's people from generation to generation (Isaiah 59:21). In the Old Testament era, Israel was the guardian of the Scriptures (Romans 3:2). In our current time period, the church, as "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15; cf. Matthew 28:18-20; John 17:8), is the guardian of the preserved Word of God. While Satan has never been able to defeat God and take His Word from His people, the devil has used wicked men to attempt to corrupt the Bible. The apostle Paul testified that even in the first century there were "many, which corrupt the word of God" (2 Corinthians 2:17). A good church will defend the perfectly preserved Word of God, which is found in the traditional Old Testament Hebrew Masoretic text and the traditional New Testament Greek Received Text, the basis for the English King James Version of the Bible. The New Testament Greek text underlying the King James Bible has been available and in use by God's churches and people ever since it was given to the first century churches by inspiration. Satan has corrupted various passages in modern English

Bible versions that seek to replace the King James Version. Note the comparisons below between the pure Word of God in the King James Bible (KJB) and the corruptions in various modern "Bible" versions. The popular New International Version (NIV) is used, but these, and many other corruptions, are found in almost all other modern English "Bibles":

King James Bible	New International Version	Doctrine attacked	Comment
And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. (1 Timothy 3:16)	Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory. (1 Timothy 3:16)	Deity of Christ	Nearly 100% of Greek manuscripts (MSS) in existence read *God.* A handful have been corrupted to read *who* or *which* instead. Both of these readings have grammatical problems. Not one Greek MSS says *he.* The NIV has a very deceptive footnote on the word *he* which states, "Some manuscripts [read] *God.*" One would think that most MSS say *he,* while "some," that is, a few, read *God,* but actually the overwhelming majority read *God* and not even one says *he!* Textual footnotes in modern "Bible" versions should not be trusted. The NIV's alteration removes the testimony of this verse to Christ's Deity.
And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. (1 John 4:3)	but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus ["Christ is come in the flesh" removed] is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. (1 John 4:3)	Humanity of Christ	The overwhelming majority of MSS read with the KJV again. The NIV allows for a false "Jesus" (2 Corinthians 11:4; Matthew 24:24) in this verse, one who is not fully God and fully Man in one Person.
But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: (Matthew 5:22)	But I tell you that anyone who is angry ["without a cause" removed] with his brother will be subject to judgment. (Matthew 5:22)	Sinlessness of Christ	Once again, thousands of Greek MSS have "without a cause." Five do not. In Mark 3:5, Christ was angry because of the hardness of men's hearts. The NIV, by teaching that men should never be angry, even at sin, blasphemously makes the

			Lord Jesus into a sinner.
In whom we have redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins: (Colossians 1:14)	in whom we have redemption, ["through his blood" removed] the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)	Blood of Christ	"Through his blood" is found in the majority of Greek MSS. The NIV's removal of this passage attacks the fact that Christ's blood washes away our sins.
Who being the brightness of *his* glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; (Hebrews 1:3)	The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins ["by himself" removed], he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (Hebrews 1:3)	Cross of Christ	"By himself" is found in the overwhelming majority of MSS. The truth that Christ's work on the cross is perfectly sufficient to save is attacked by removing the fact that the Lord Jesus purged our sins "by himself." The NIV leaves room here for us to help pay for our own sins and denies the sufficiency of Christ's redemptive work.
Mark 16:9-20 records the resurrection of Christ and His ascension into heaven.	The NIV separates Mark 16:9-20 from v. 8 with a large line to indicate that the gospel "really" ends in v. 8, and it then states that the "most reliable" sources do not have Mark 16:9-20.	Resurrection of Christ	Mark 16:9-20 is found in thousands of Greek MSS. It is missing in only three. Two of these have clear signs of being tampered with at this point and are some of the most corrupt MSS ever discovered,[3] while the third was only created in the 12th century! The NIV, after an extremely deceptive and inaccurate footnote, removes 11 whole verses from God's Word, removes entirely the record of Christ's appearances after His resurrection from the book of Mark, removes His

[3] The two manuscripts are codex Sinaiticus (also called *Aleph*) and codex Vaticanus (also called *B*). Sinaiticus is "covered with . . . alterations of an obviously correctional character[,] brought in by at least ten different revisers . . . it is plain that this . . . codex bears upon its face the most incontestable proof of its corrupt and defective character . . . on many occasions 10, 20, 30, 40 words are dropped through very carelessness . . . the impurity of the Codex Sinaiticus, in every part of it, was fully recognized by those best acquainted with it, and that from the beginning until the time when it was finally cast aside as worthless for any practical purpose." Likewise, "in the Gospels alone Codex B (Vatican) leaves out words or whole clauses no less than 1,491 times. It bears traces of careless transcription on every page." Anyone who places weight on what these two MSS say, when they differ from over "ninety-nine out of a hundred of the whole body of extant MSS," is exceedingly foolish. (Quotes from pgs. 73-80 *True or False? The Westcott-Hort Textual Theory Examined,* ed. David Otis Fuller. Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1973).

			return to heaven to sit at the right hand of God, and ends Mark's gospel, the "good news," not with Christ's triumphant resurrection and ascension, but with "they [the disciples] were afraid"!
For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. (1 John 5:7)	For there are three that testify ["in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" removed]: (1 John 5:7)	The Trinity	Ancient translational, patristic, and MSS evidence support the reading of the KJB, which was also found in every English Bible before its day. Removal of the Trinity in 1 John 5:7 creates a grammatical error in the Greek text. God did not inspire grammar errors. The NIV removes the clearest single verse on the Trinity from the Word of God!
As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. (Mark 1:2-3)	It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"—"a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" (Mark 1:2-3)	Error-free nature of Scripture	Over 99% of Greek MSS have the KJB reading. "I send my messenger . . . before thee" is Malachi 3:1, and "The voice of one . . . paths straight" is Isaiah 40:3. The KJB correctly states these quotes are from the "prophets." The NIV says that Malachi 3:1 was written by "Isaiah the prophet," inserting an error into God's Word.
But go ye and learn what *that* meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. (Matthew 9:13)	But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners ["to repentance" removed]." (Matthew 9:13)	Salvation	The overwhelming majority of MSS have "to repentance." The NIV attacks the fact that sinners must repent if they wish to be saved.
Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. (Mark 9:44, 46)	Mark 9:44, 46 are taken out of the Bible.	Hell	Once again, 99%+ of MSS have the verses. The NIV removes these warnings about hell.
And as they went on *their* way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine	As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" [v. 37 removed] And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip	Baptism	Acts 8:37 is clearly attested by extremely early textual witnesses, reaching close to the lifetime of the apostles. It has the support of Greek MSS and the ancient Old Latin, Latin Vulgate, Syriac, Ethiopic, Armenian, Arabic,

heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. (Acts 8:36-38)	and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. (Acts 8:36-38)		Slavonic, etc. versions. The KJB shows that baptism is for believers only, upon confession of their faith in Jesus Christ. The NIV, in this passage, would allow for the baptism of unrepentant Muslims, Hindus, atheists, and whoever else wants it.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Matthew 6:13)	And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one ["for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." removed]' (Matthew 6:13)	Prayer	Thousands of Greek MSS read with the KJB; only three do not, and these three do not even agree with each other on how to change the passage. In Matthew 6:9-13, the Lord Jesus gives us a model for prayer. He tells us that we should end our prayers by giving glory to God for His eternal kingdom, power, and glory. The NIV denies that we should end our prayers with this, teaching instead that we should end focusing on ourselves. In the KJB, prayer begins and ends with God. In the NIV, prayer begins with "our Father," v. 9, but ends with the "evil one," the devil!

A faithful church will take the warning of Revelation 22:18-19 very seriously: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book." It will fulfill its role as the institution ordained by God to defend the Scriptures. It will not preach from corrupt English versions, but will warn its membership about them. It will use the pure, preserved Word of God, found in English in the King James Version.[4]

The Lord's church recognizes the Bible as the perfectly inspired Word of God. It does not follow any other book, nor recognize any human traditions, as an authority for what it should believe and practice. It should also reject all corrupt translations of the Bible to follow the Greek

[4] Please contact us if you would like further information on the matter of Bible texts and versions.

and Hebrew texts God has perfectly preserved, which are represented in the English language in the King James Version, the traditional English Bible.

II. Congregational government and church autonomy

Within the world of what calls itself Christianity today, people have many different ideas about the structure of the church. There is much confusion on this topic. Thankfully, the Bible is clear. The church of Christ has a *congregational* form of government. This means that the members of the assembly have ultimate decision making authority, under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ and with the advice of the pastor or pastors. Also, nobody is allowed to join the church of God, or remain in its membership, who has not been born again and whose life does not show evidence of regeneration. Furthermore, Christ's churches are *autonomous:* every assembly is independent of every other congregation. No hierarchy tells the church what to do. Where does the Bible teach these things?

1 Peter 2:5, 9 refers to believers as "an holy __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. . . . But ye *are* a chosen generation, a __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __, 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." Everyone who has been born again is, in a spiritual sense, a priest. He can come directly to God and offer Him the sacrifices of praise, thanks, and a holy life. No believer, including church leadership, has this position of spiritual priesthood any more than every other believer. Church membership is limited to those who are already born again, and are thus spiritually priests. People do not join the church to be saved, but because they already are saved. Notice the membership of the church at Corinth included only "them that are __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ in Christ Jesus, called *to be* __ __ __ __ __ __" (1 Corinthians 1:2; cf. Romans 1:7; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2). Those who could not testify of their conversion or show evidence of sanctification in their lives were not let into the membership. If "ungodly men . . . crept in unawares [secretly]" (Jude 4) into the congregation, so that some who already were church members stopped living a holy life, or departed from the faith, the church was responsible to remove the disobedient ones from the membership roll. In Matthew 18:15-17, the Lord Jesus explained the steps of this process: "Moreover if thy brother shall __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ against thee, go and __ __ __ __ __ __ __ his fault between thee and him __ __ __ __ __: if he shall __ __ __ __ thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear *thee, then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of __ __ __ or __ __ __ __ __ witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, __ __ __ __ *it* unto the __ __ __ __ __ __: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __

and a publican." If someone in the congregation falls into sin, another member is to deal with him privately about his error. If he repents, no further action is necessary. However, if he will not listen to the private rebuke, then two or three are to deal with the sinning one. If he listens to them, once again, it is all over. If he will not listen to them either, the matter is taken before the entire church. If the disobedient member will still not repent, he is treated like a "heathen man [an unsaved person] and a publican [a Roman tax collector—an ungodly man]," that is, he is removed from the church membership and is treated like an unsaved person. The church members are to "put away from among [themselves] that wicked person" (1 Corinthians 5:13), to "mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which [they] have learned; and avoid them" (Romans 16:17) and to "withdraw . . . from every brother that walketh disorderly . . . if any man obey not [the Word of God], [they are to] note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14). This is done to honor and obey God and to maintain the testimony of the church to the world. Church discipline is also done in hope that the sinning one will repent and be restored to church fellowship (Galatians 6:1; 1 Corinthians 5:4-5; 2 Corinthians 2:6-7). A congregation that allows unsaved people into its membership, or refuses to remove those who are unrepentantly living in sin, and so gets filled up with ungodly people, ceases to be a church of Christ (Revelation 1:20; 2:5; 2:16; 3:3). The true church maintains a membership roll (Acts 1:15; 5:13) of born-again and faithful people.

No hierarchy tells the congregation of the Lord what to do—only "Christ is the head of the church" (Ephesians 5:23). Each assembly is autonomous or independent. We have just learned that Matthew 18:15-17 teaches that when someone falls into sin, he is dealt with privately, then by two or three, and then by the congregation. If he does not repent, the church has the power to remove him. The assembly does not need to appeal to the decision of some person or group higher in authority before expelling the sinner from its membership—it can decide on its own, and its decision is final, ratified by heaven (Matthew 18:18-19) with the authority of Jesus Christ (Matthew 18:20). Whoever or whatever can control the membership of an organization has ultimate power over it; since, as Matthew 18 demonstrates, the church body as a whole controls its own membership, it is the highest authority for its own affairs. Other passages of Scripture illustrate how individual churches determine their own courses of action. In Acts 15:22-23, decisions were made by the "whole church," not the leadership alone. In Acts 6:5, the "whole multitude" of the church membership chose the deacons. The church membership authorized its own church planters or missionaries (Acts 13:1-4; 15:40). In Acts 14:23, the church voted to select its own elders or pastors, for the word translated *ordain* means

"to choose or elect to office by the raising of hands,"[5] as is verified in the only other place the word appears in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 8:19, "*was* . . . *chosen* of the churches"). The Bible contains no trace of archbishops, metropolitans, cardinals, a pope, presidents, or any other sort of top-down chain of command. Nor does it refer to any convention, national assembly, ecumenical council, association, world headquarters, or any equivalent body that has the power to tell churches what to do. Rather, the Lord Jesus said, "One is your Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __. And call no *man* your __ __ __ __ __ __ [in the sense of a spiritual office] upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, *even* Christ. But he that is __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:8-12). While united in love and concern for each other, every church of Christ is organizationally independent of every other church. The Lord's assemblies are free to choose to work together to promote the work of God in the world, and they often do work together in this way, but no governmental tie or hierarchy binds them together.

The Biblical doctrine of congregational church government does not exclude offices of leadership in the assembly. The Bible teaches that there are two positions of leadership in the church today:[6] the offices of pastor and of deacon. Three Greek words refer to the pastoral office: *episcopos,* translated *overseer* (Acts 20:28) or *bishop* (1 Timothy 3:1)*, presbuteros,* translated as *elder* (1 Timothy 5:17)*,* and *poimen,* translated *pastor* (Ephesians 4:11) or *shepherd* (1 Peter 2:25). The bishop, elder, and pastor are not three different officers, but three different titles for the same position. In Acts 20:17, 28 the "elders" (from *presbuteros*) are also "overseers" (from *episcopos*), and they are to "feed," that is, "shepherd" or "pastor" (related to

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[5] Χειροτονέω *(Cheirotoneo), Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains,* Johannes P. Louw & Eugene A. Nida, New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1989. The *Greek-English Lexicon,* H. G. Liddell & R. Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), gives the meaning to "stretch out the hand, for the purpose of giving one's vote in the assembly . . . vote . . . elect . . . by show of hands," and the *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature,* 3rd. ed. (BDAG), rev. & ed. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2000), states it is "to elect or choose someone for definite offices or tasks, choose," giving instances of the word in the New Testament and early Christian literature where it is used for "congregations choos[ing] a representative . . . congregations choos[ing] envoys . . . congregations are to elect their own supervisors (*episcopoi*) and ministers (*diakonoi*)."

[6] The church also sends out *evangelists*, who are commonly called *missionaries* today, to preach the gospel and start new churches (Ephesians 4:11; Acts 21:8; 8:5, 12, 40). The offices of *apostle* and *prophet* were only for the foundation period of the church (Ephesians 2:20) and are no longer needed since, with the completion of the New Testament, the foundation of the church is complete and finished. There were only twelve apostles (Revelation 21:14), and they had physically seen Christ after His resurrection and so could bear eyewitness testimony to that fact, among other qualifications (Acts 1:21-22). They could do miracles like raising the dead (Acts 20:9-10). If someone claims to be an apostle today, it is worth asking him if he has been alive for the last 2,000 years and is an eyewitness of the Lord's resurrection. He can also be asked which one of the twelve he is. Finally, he should be asked for the names and addresses of some people he has raised from the dead.

poimen) the "flock" (*poimneon*). In 1 Peter 5:1-2, the "elders" (from *presbuteros)* are to "feed" (from *poimen,* "shepherd/pastor") the "flock," taking the "oversight" (from *episcopos,* "bishop") thereof. While the pastors or overseers of the church are not to act as dictators, being "lords over *God's* heritage" (1 Peter 5:3), church members should have deep respect for them. Hebrews 13:7, 17 command, "__ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith __ __ __ __ __ __, considering the end of *their* conversation. . . . __ __ __ __ them that have the __ __ __ __ over you, and __ __ __ __ __ __ yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you." The overseers are very important to a church. While they are obviously not infallible, we must take what they say very seriously, recognize their wisdom and knowledge of the Scriptures, and obey their godly counsel. Rejecting pastoral guidance is a dangerous business! The position of *deacon* is one of service to the church and of meeting physical needs; in Acts 6:1-5, seven deacons were chosen to help with the material needs of the congregation so that the pastors could "give [themselves] continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). The word *deacon* is sometimes translated *servant* in the Bible (Matthew 23:11; Mark 9:35). The church chooses deacons to help and serve the pastors and church body. Neither the pastor nor the deacon is referred to as a class of "clergy" which is over the "laity," supposedly the rest of the church. Nothing like the word "laity" or "layman" is found in the Bible, while the Greek word *kleros,* from which the English word *clergy* is derived, is found in 1 Peter 5:3, where it is translated "heritage" and refers to the entire congregation! The true church, then, has no "laity," but is made up entirely of "clergy." Nor should the pastor or deacon be called *reverend,* a title only used for God (Psalm 111:9), or *Father,* for God is our only spiritual and heavenly Father (Matthew 23:9). The two Biblical offices in the congregation do have certain qualifications, listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-13[7] and Titus 1:5-9.[8] These passages are worthy of serious study and

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[7] 1 This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; 3 Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; 4 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; 5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) 6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. 8 Likewise *must* the deacons *be* grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; 9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. 10 And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless. 11 Even so *must their* wives *be* grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. 12 Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 13 For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

[8] 5 For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: 6 If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children

meditation. The pastor must be a holy, "blameless" man (1 Timothy 3:1), with knowledge, ability and experience in the study and teaching of the Scriptures (v. 2, 6). He must be the "husband of one wife," and must be one who "ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity," (v. 2, 4), so a man who is divorced, remarried (unless his wife has died), or who has rebellious and ungodly children, is disqualified (cf. Mark 10:11-12; Romans 7:1-3; Titus 1:6). Since it is obvious that only a man can be a "husband" (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6), women cannot have the office of pastor (cf. 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 1 Corinthians 14:34-37). Deacons must also be holy men with obedient, godly families (1 Timothy 3:7-13). The two offices of pastor and deacon are very valuable to the church of the Lord Jesus.

We have learned that each one of the Lord's churches is an independent congregation, free from all hierarchy and organizational ties. The members of each assembly, as spiritual priests of God, have the authority to govern the affairs of their church, following Jesus Christ, the only Head of the church. True churches guard their membership, allowing only those who have been born again and show evidence of regeneration in their lives to be members. God has instituted two important positions of leadership in the church: the pastor, also called the overseer, bishop, or elder, and the deacon. These offices have specific spiritual qualifications. Obedience to the Biblical pattern for church government is extremely important if congregations are to give glory to their Lord and effectively serve Him.

III. Biblical ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper

Paul commended the church at Corinth because it kept "the ordinances" as he had "delivered them" (1 Corinthians 11:2). Christ has given His church two ordinances to practice today: baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is also called *communion*. The Savior told His church to baptize those who had been taught the gospel, and promised that He would be with His congregations of Biblically baptized believers "alway, *even* unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:18-20). Scripture also declares that the church would show forth Christ's death in the Lord's Supper "till he come" (1 Corinthians 11:26). These promises demonstrate that the congregation of Christ would maintain the true practice of the two ordinances until the return of the Lord Jesus. Religious organizations that have corrupted these important practices cannot be churches of Christ. Let us, then, carefully study what God's Word says about them!

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not accused of riot or unruly. 7 For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; 8 But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; 9 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

We should first consider that baptism and the Supper are not *sacraments,* but *ordinances.* An ordinance is a religious act commanded by Christ. A sacrament is a religious ritual that (supposedly) contributes to receiving salvation. Some "Christian" religions call baptism and communion sacraments. Others say that there are seven sacraments, adding confirmation, the Mass, penance, extreme unction, matrimony, and ordination to baptism and the Supper. (It is amazing that anyone would claim that these seven sacraments are from God, when nothing like the "sacraments" of confirmation, the Mass, penance, or extreme unction is mentioned even once in the Bible! Nor does matrimony, getting married, help save someone from his sin. Finally, if someone is still unsaved, and so needs sacraments to help him get into God's favor, what business does he have receiving the "sacrament" of ordination and taking the office of pastor?) Actually, the Bible never calls anything a sacrament; there are not seven sacraments, or two sacraments. There are zero sacraments. Neither baptism nor communion removes sin.[9] We will see that one actually needs to have his sin washed away in the blood of Jesus Christ before he can properly participate in either ordinance.

A. Baptism

Baptism is mentioned close to 100 times in the New Testament—it is important! There are four essential aspects to a Biblical baptism. A valid baptism requires a Scriptural candidate, a Scriptural mode, a Scriptural purpose, and a Scriptural authority. Let us look at each of these.

A believer is the only Scriptural candidate for baptism. The ordinance is for those who have repented and believed the gospel, are consequently born again, and therefore show their regeneration in their changed lives. Baptism is the "answer of a good conscience before God" (1 Peter 3:21). Lost people, therefore, cannot be Scripturally baptized. Infants, since they cannot repent or believe (Jonah 4:11; Deuteronomy 1:39), cannot be Biblically baptized. The Bible contains no examples, or even the slightest hint, of infant baptism. The Lord Jesus Christ taught that the proper order is "believeth and is baptized" (Mark 16:16). The apostle Peter preached "Repent, and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). John the Baptist required people to confess their sins before he would baptize them (Matthew 3:6)—obviously no infants were receiving baptism! In Acts 8:12, when people "when [people] __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Philip [the evangelist] preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __, both __ __ __ and __ __ __ __ __." Men and women who believed were baptized, but babies were not. In Acts 8:36-38, when a new believer, a man who was a eunuch,

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[9] For a detailed study of passages that allegedly prove that baptism takes away sin, please request a free copy of *Heaven Only For The Baptized? The Gospel of Christ vs. Pardon through Baptism,* by Thomas Ross.

asked Philip, "See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? [Then] Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And [the eunuch] answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. . . . [so] they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." People may call the application of water to adults who are still not saved, or to infants, "baptism," but the Word of God does nothing of the kind.

The Scriptural mode of baptism is dipping or immersion. The Greek verb translated "baptize," *baptidzo,* means "to dip . . . to immerse, to submerge."[10] To *baptize* and to *immerse* are synonymous terms. The Greek words for *pour* or *sprinkle* are never used for baptism.[11] Many verses of Scripture prove that immersion is the way God's church practices this ordinance. Colossians 2:12 reads, "__ __ __ __ __ __ with him [Christ] in baptism, wherein also ye are __ __ __ __ __ __ with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." Baptism is a picture of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (something we will speak of again when we look at the meaning of baptism). When people are buried, they are put all the way under the ground—they do not just have a little bit of dirt poured or sprinkled on their heads! Only if someone is placed completely under water, and then brought up again, can baptism picture the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The examples of the baptism of Christ and of others also show that immersion was practiced. "Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway <u>out of the water</u>" (Matthew 3:16). "Jesus . . . was baptized of John <u>in</u> Jordan. And straightway coming up <u>out of the water</u>, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him" (Mark 1:9-10). "John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was <u>much water</u> there [do sprinkling or pouring require "much water"?]: and they came, and were baptized" (John 3:23). "they went down both <u>into the water</u>, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were <u>come up out of the water</u>, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:38-39). Interestingly, the founders and leaders of the modern denominations which practice sprinkling or pouring instead of dipping knew that the churches of the Bible practiced immersion—but they decided to do it their own way instead![12] We, however, dare not reject God's pattern for us. We must do things the Bible way, and baptize only by immersion.

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[10] *Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament,* Henry Thayer. The *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature,* ed. William Danker (3rd ed.— BDAG) states that *baptidzo* is "in Greek literature generally to put or go under water." See also *baptidzo,* pg. 529-530, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964).

[11] The word for "sprinkle" is *rantidzo* (cf. Hebrews 9:21), and "pour" is *keo* (cf. Acts 2:17, *ekkeo,* "pour out," Job 29:6 LXX, "pour," *keo*). Neither word is used for baptism.

[12] Roman Catholicism practiced immersion widely for over a thousand years before switching, several centuries ago, to pouring. The Eastern Orthodox denominations still practice immersion (on infants, however). Martin Luther, the founder of the Lutheran denomination, stated in a sermon on baptism in 1518, that "baptism is . .

Baptism has a Scriptural purpose. It is to picture the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism also pictures our death to our old way of life and resurrection to a new life in Christ, based on our union with the risen Savior. When we believed in the Lord and were born again, we died to our old sinful ways and were raised again to spiritual life in Christ. Romans 6:3-6 reads, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __? Therefore we are __ __ __ __ __ __ with him by baptism into __ __ __ __ __: that like as Christ was __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should __ __ __ __ in __ __ __ __ __ __ __ of __ __ __ __. For if we have been planted together in the __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of *his* resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ sin." Galatians 3:27 also tells us that "as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have __ __ __ __ __ Christ." When someone joins the army, he puts on a uniform. The uniform identifies the man with his new position as a solider in the military. Baptism is the "uniform" one puts on after joining the army of the Lord Jesus Christ. It publicly identifies you with the Savior. It lets the world know that you are on His side. It tells everyone that you believe that He died, was buried, and rose again, and that this work of love He did for you has taken away your sins. It is a declaration that you have been given a new heart, are dead to your old ungodly ways, and have determined that you will serve the Son of God. What a beautiful emblem of the work of Christ, and of His salvation of sinners, is seen in baptism!

The church of Christ is the only Biblical administrator of baptism today. If you want to get baptized, you cannot just go with a friend of yours to a pool and have him dip you in the water. In Matthew 28:18-20, the Lord Jesus spoke to His church, "saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. __ __ __ __ therefore, and __ __ __ __ __ all nations, __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ them in the name of the __ __ __ __ __ __, and of the __ __ __, and of the __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __: __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am __ __ __ __ __ __ __ alway, *even* unto the end of the world." Christ commanded His church to go out preaching, teach people to be saved, baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and then teach them all things whatsoever are

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. when we dip anything wholly in water, that it is completely covered over. . . . it should be thus, and would be right . . . [for] the child or any one who is to be baptized, [to] be completely sunk down into the water, and dipt again and drawn out" (*Opera Lutheri, I.* 319, folio ed., quoted on pg. 108, Christian, J. T., *A History of the Baptists,* vol. 1, Texarkana, TX: Bogard Press, 1922.) John Calvin, who is essentially the founder of the Reformed and Presbyterian denominations, stated that "it is evident that the term *baptize* means to immerse, and that this was the form used by the primitive Church" (Calvin, *Institutes,* 4:15:19, trans. Henry Beveridge). John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist denomination, commenting on Romans 6:4, states that the "ancient manner of baptizing [was] by immersion" (*John Wesley's Notes on the Old and New Testaments,* 1767).

commanded in the Bible. Our Lord's command in Matthew 28 helps us understand why baptism adds us to the membership of the church that authorizes the ordinance; "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body [the body of Christ, the church]" (1 Corinthians 12:13; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:27; 1:2). In Acts 2:41-42, those that "gladly received [Peter's] word [the gospel message] were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." What were these three thousand new converts "added" to? Acts 2:47 tells us, "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." After you are born again, baptism is the means through which you join the church. This also shows us why baptism cannot be performed by just anybody. If your friend dunked you in a pool, what church would you have just become a member of?

The ordinance of baptism began when God gave John the Baptist direct authority from Him (Matthew 21:23-26; John 1:33) to begin to immerse believers. John was to preach the gospel (John 1:29) and prepare people for the ministry of Christ (Luke 1:17). The Lord Jesus, as an example for His people to follow, submitted to John's baptism (Matthew 3:13-17). The apostles also were immersed by John (Acts 1:20-22). The Baptist preached the gospel, people repented and believed, and John baptized these converts. When the Lord Jesus began His ministry, John the Baptist directed his converts to follow Christ, telling them that He was the promised Messiah and Savior (John 1:29-37; 3:26-30). The Lord Jesus started His church (Matthew 16:18; 18:17) from the people who were saved and baptized through the ministry of John. The Lord Himself and those first church members also preached the gospel, so that people were born again and added to the church through baptism (John 4:1-2; Matthew 4:17; Mark 3:14). After Christ died and rose again, He commanded His church, "Go ye into all the world, and __ __ __ __ __ __ the __ __ __ __ __ __ to __ __ __ __ __ creature" (Mark 16:15). The resurrected Lord who has "all power . . . in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:17) told His congregations to "Go . . . teach all nations [the way of salvation, so that people would receive Christ and be born again] . . . baptiz[e] [the new disciples] in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, [and] . . . teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded" (Matthew 28:18-20). He gave His church authority to baptize. The first church, which the Lord Jesus had started while on earth, after being empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), faithfully preached the gospel, baptized converts, and started new assemblies, as is recorded throughout the book of Acts. The true churches of today are the spiritual children of that first church. (We will look at the historical succession of the Lord Jesus' assemblies later in this Bible study.) Authority to baptize was given to John the Baptist, then to the first church, which started new churches, which themselves started churches, and so on, all the way until we come to the Biblical congregations of today. Since John the Baptist died and went to heaven some two

thousand years ago, only the church of the Lord Jesus has the right to baptize people today. No individual person, or religious organization other than the church founded by Christ in the first century, can administer a Scriptural baptism.

We have learned that there are four requirements for a Biblical baptism. Baptism requires a Scriptural candidate—a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, rather than people who have not been transformed by the new birth, including infants. It requires a Scriptural mode—immersion, not sprinkling or pouring. It requires a Scriptural purpose—to picture Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, as well as the saint's death to his old life and resurrection to new life in Christ. Someone who was "baptized" in order to be saved, or for some other unbiblical reason, has not genuinely participated in the ordinance. Baptism also requires a Scriptural authority—the church Jesus started, not any other religious organization within what is called Christianity, or some individual on his own. If you have been born again, it is very important for you to receive Biblical baptism as soon as possible. The ungodly "rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized" (Luke 7:30), but Acts 2:41-42 tells us that "they that gladly received [the gospel message] were __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls. And they __ in the apostles' doctrine and __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." When these three thousand people believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and were saved, they all submitted to baptism, and then faithfully continued in the fellowship of the church (Acts 2:47). This is the pattern throughout the entire New Testament. The Bible gives us no examples of people who received Christ but then stubbornly refused to be baptized. Baptism does not forgive your sins—they must be forgiven before you can be Biblically immersed—but if they have been forgiven, your new heart and new life will direct you to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, on the authority of one of God's churches. Jesus Christ is Lord—if you are His child, you need to follow His command to be baptized!

B. The Lord's Supper

The second ordinance that the church is to observe is the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20), also known as *communion* (1 Corinthians 10:16). The Lord Jesus gave this ordinance to His church the night He was betrayed and given to His enemies to be crucified (1 Corinthians 11:23). Matthew 26:26-28 records the events that took place: "And as they were eating, Jesus took __ __ __ __ __, and __ __ __ __ __ __ __ *it*, and __ __ __ __ __ *it*, and __ __ __ __ *it* to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." In 1 Corinthians 11:23-27, the apostle Paul comments on this

institution: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, __ __ __ __, __ __ __: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ of me. After the same manner also *he took* the __ __ __, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ in my __ __ __ __ __: __ __ __ __ __ __ ye, as __ __ __ as ye drink *it*, in __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do __ __ __ __ [proclaim] the Lord's death __ __ __ __ he __ __ __ __." We can see from this what the Lord did when He instituted communion, and what His church is, therefore, to do. The Lord took the "bread," gave thanks for it, "brake" the bread, distributed or "gave" it to those assembled, and explained that it represented His body, which was to be broken in the death of the cross. He then did the same thing with the "fruit of the vine" (Matthew 26:29), giving thanks for it, distributing its contents to "all" the assembly to drink (Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23), and explaining that it symbolized the blood He would shed on the cross. When the Lord's churches celebrate the Supper, they follow this procedure set up by their Savior and recorded for them in the Bible.

The two elements of the Supper are bread and the fruit of the vine. Since the bread is a picture of the sinless body of the Lord Jesus, it should be unleavened. Leaven is a picture of sin in the Bible (Matthew 16:6, 11, 12; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8; Galatians 5:9), so using leavened bread would teach the blasphemy that Christ was a sinner! Furthermore, the Redeemer instituted communion in conjunction with the Passover meal (Matthew 26:17-19), which used unleavened bread (Exodus 12:8), so we know what type of bread He used at that time. Grape juice is the other element. Alcoholic wine must not be used in the Lord's Supper. First, as we saw in Bible study #3, drinking alcohol is a sin (Proverbs 20:1). God curses those who give others alcoholic beverages (Habakkuk 2:15)—the Lord Jesus would never have sinned by distributing alcohol to others, especially as a holy reminder of His sacrificial death! Second, the poison of alcohol would be a terrible picture of the precious, perfect, sinless blood of Christ. Unfermented juice is the pure product of the grape vine (Deuteronomy 32:14; 29:6; Genesis 49:11). Third, while the word *wine* in the Bible often does not refer to an alcoholic beverage at all,[13] the beverage in the Supper is called the "cup" or the "fruit of the vine,"—Scripture never even uses the word *wine* for it! Only unleavened bread and nonalcoholic grape juice are the proper elements in the Lord's Supper.

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[13] The Greek and Hebrew words for *wine* can refer to either a fermented or unfermented beverage; context will make it clear which is meant. Verses like Proverbs 23:29-31 clearly refer to alcoholic wine, while verses like Isaiah 65:8, where the juice inside grapes still on the grapevine is called "wine," clearly do not involve fermentation.

While someone who just read the Bible would never get this idea, many "Christian" groups teach that something magical happens to the bread and wine[14] in the "sacrament" of communion, so that the elements change into something else. A common false doctrine is that the elements change in substance when a priest says certain words, so that the bread and wine are gone. The bread (supposedly) miraculously changes into the actual flesh of the Lord Jesus, and the alcohol becomes His actual blood. The bread is then worshipped as if it were actually Jesus Christ Himself, and the sacrifice on the cross is said to be repeated by the priest offering the body of "Jesus" again. People who take communion are told that they are actually eating human flesh and drinking blood the priest has created by a miracle—even though what they eat and drink looks, feels, smells, and tastes no different than it did before the priest spoke the magic words over it! Other false teachers claim that Jesus is in, with, and under the bread and wine, so that although the elements are still there, those who take communion still eat and drink the actual body and blood of Christ. Others think that those who trust the "sacrament" of the Supper to help forgive their sins consume Christ's body and blood in a spiritual way when they eat the bread and drink from the cup. All these ideas may sound blasphemous and absurd to you—and so they should, for they are. Yet, amazingly, the large majority of people within Christendom are in denominations that teach one of these three ideas! What does the Bible say? Does a miracle happen to the bread and juice in communion, so that people really eat flesh and drink blood?

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:26-27, tells us twice that people "eat this __ __ __ __ __" in the Supper. They do not eat human flesh, but bread. In Matthew 26:29, the Lord Jesus said that what He had given thanks for and given the disciples to drink (Matthew 26:27) was "this fruit of the vine." It was still juice, not human blood. Nothing happens to the bread or the juice—it remains exactly the same.[15] The idea that a priest calls Christ down out of heaven, changes

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[14] The groups that believe in sacraments almost always use alcoholic wine instead of grape juice in communion.

[15] Those who defend the false doctrine that the bread and the fruit of the vine change in their substance argue that since Christ said, "This <u>is</u> my body" (Matthew 26:26), not "This represents/symbolizes my body," at that moment He made the bread and juice disappear, changing them into His actual body and blood. However, the Lord is obviously speaking metaphorically to make a spiritual point, just like when He said "I am the door" (John 10:9), "I am the light" (John 8:12), and "I am the vine" (John 15:5). Is the Savior a literal door, or a light ray, or a plant? Of course not! He was using symbolic language to make a point. The same thing is true of when Christ said "This is my body." Besides, when He spoke those words while instituting communion, He was right there, in His human body, in front of the disciples; nothing changed in His humanity so that He was gone and the bread was now His body. Furthermore, in the next verse, He said, "this <u>cup</u> is the new testament in my blood," which cannot possibly be literal, since everyone agrees that the Lord Jesus spoke of the juice in the cup, and not the cup itself. Besides, two sentences after Christ spoke the words "this is my body," supposedly changing the elements into His flesh and blood, He called the contents of the cup the "fruit of the vine" (Matthew 26:29)—so either the juice had never changed into blood at all, or the elements changed from human flesh and blood back into bread and juice within two sentences!

bread and alcohol into His body and blood, worships the bread, and sacrifices the Lord all over again, is abominable idolatry. The Lord Jesus Christ died only one time (Hebrews 9:26-28). He "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever" (Hebrews 10:12), and cannot be resacrificed. His work on the cross was perfect, and must never be added to (Hebrews 10:10, 14). His body in not on earth in a piece of bread, nor on earth anywhere else—He has gone away (John 16:7) into heaven, and is at the right hand of God the Father (Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33-35; 7:55-56; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 12:2). When the church celebrates the Lord's Supper, the bread and juice are reminders, memorials, of the work of salvation the Savior completed through His cross. He said, "this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew [show forth, declare, proclaim—not repeat!] the Lord's death till he come" (1 Corinthians 11:25-26; cf. Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24). The elements in communion remain bread and juice. They are wonderful symbols of Christ's body broken for us on the cross, and His blood shed for us there, but they are nothing more.

When a congregation gathers to observe the ordinance of communion, it should practice what Paul told the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 11:27-33: "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __, shall be __ __ __ __ __ __ of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation[16] to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many *are* __ __ __ __ and __ __ __ __ __ __ among you, and many __ __ __ __ __ [are dead]. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, __ __ __ __ __ one for another." Everyone who takes the bread and the cup must examine himself to make sure that he is in

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False teachers also use John 6:53 as "proof" that the bread and juice are changed in the Supper—despite the fact that the Lord made it clear that He spoke spiritually (John 6:63) and He repeatedly stated that the eating and drinking metaphor of 6:53 referred to believing in Him, not the Lord's Supper (John 6:29, 30, 35, 36, 40, 47, 64, 69). Those who make John 6 into a discussion about the "sacrament" of communion would make Christ say that everyone would go to hell who did not, from that day forward, take that "sacrament" (John 6:53). Since communion did not even exist yet, and would not until the last week of the Savior's earthly life, everyone in the world who died between the time of John 6 and the institution of the "sacrament," along with all infants for the last two thousand years who died without taking the Lord's Supper, are eternally damned, according to this misinterpretation of Scripture, for dying at the wrong time!

[16] The word *damnation* in Scripture means the same thing as *judgment* or *condemnation.* All three of these English words translate the same Greek word, *krima,* which sometimes refer to someone being eternally lost (Hebrews 6:2), but sometimes refer to other kinds of judgment (such as physical death, Luke 24:20). The damnation/condemnation/judgment in 1 Corinthians 11:29 is the physical sickness and death referred to in v. 30. Verse 32 shows that physical punishment, not loss of salvation (which is impossible) and eternal torment, is in view.

fellowship with God, not holding on to any unconfessed sin. If a disobedient Christian participates in the Lord's Supper, he risks God punishing him with sickness or even death. "Many" in the church at Corinth had suffered in this way! And if the Lord corrects His erring children with this sort of severity, how much the more does an unsaved person who presumes to participate in the Supper bring the greater eternal condemnation on his head? We can also see from these judgments why it is very important for a church to celebrate communion in the way God has ordained in the Bible—messing around with this holy ordinance is very dangerous. Finally, note that the church should partake of the elements at the same time; they are to "tarry one for another," not do whatever they want on their own, eating the bread and drinking the juice whenever they want. The practice of some "Christian" denominations of having a religious leader take the bread and cup to people in the hospital or other places, where that one person takes the elements without the presence of the church, is here shown to be unbiblical. The Supper is a church ordinance, for members of the congregation who are right with God.

How often should a congregation celebrate communion? The Bible does not require any certain frequency. It simply says that "as oft as" or "as often as" (1 Corinthians 11:25-26) it is done, it is a remembrance and a proclamation of Christ's death (1 Corinthians 11:26). We must not add to the Bible and require a particular frequency when God does not do so. The main thing is that, however often a church practices the Supper, it follows all the requirements that God has revealed.

Since the Lord's Supper is a church ordinance, like baptism, it should be celebrated only by the members of a particular congregation. In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Paul is always talking to the particular church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2). Since the Supper is the "communion of the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:16), and every individual congregation is the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), the Lord's Supper is for members of the particular assembly only. This means that non-members who may be present when a congregation celebrates communion are not to take the elements with them. People who are unsaved, or people who are not members of a true church of Christ, even if they belong to other religious organizations, are excluded. People who regularly attend the church that is celebrating the Supper, but have not received Biblical baptism and are not members, cannot participate. People who are members of other true churches, but happen to be visiting the services of a different church of God when that congregation is celebrating the Supper, cannot join in with them; they are to celebrate the ordinance with the church they belong to. The fact that only members of a particular congregation celebrate the Supper together does not mean that they think that they are better than others who are members of other churches, or people who have not obeyed Christ's command to be baptized; they simply want to follow the Bible way in practicing their Savior's holy ordinance.

We have learned that the Lord's Supper, or communion, is a memorial of the Lord Jesus' death and shed blood. Two elements are involved: unleavened bread and grape juice. These elements do not change into anything else in the Supper, nor do they convey salvation to those who partake of them. The Supper is for those who, having been baptized, are members of the particular assembly celebrating the ordinance. Those who participate must examine themselves and be sure that they are in fellowship with their Lord before they participate. Then they can joyfully remember the broken body and shed blood of their Redeemer through this glorious celebration He has ordained.

The fact that communion is for the Lord's congregation gives us another reason to be church members—non-members miss out on the wonderful ability to have fellowship or communion with the Redeemer and His people in the Supper. As soon as someone has been saved, he should seek for baptism and membership in a church of Christ, so that he can join that assembly in celebrating the blessed and holy ordinance of the Lord's Supper. Only in this way can he obey the command, "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24).

IV. Faithfulness to Bible doctrine

Christ's churches will seek to believe every truth found in the Word of God. The church of God will believe the doctrines we have covered in Bible studies #1-6, including: the Bible as the inspired (2 Timothy 3:16) and preserved (Psalm 12:6-7) Word of God; the recognition of only one God, who has eternally existed in three distinct Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (1 John 5:7); the sinfulness and ruin of the human race on account of the sin of Adam (Romans 5:19), of man's sinful nature (Jeremiah 17:9), and the many personal violations of God's Law by all people (Romans 3:23). Christ's churches believe that the saved will be forever with the Lord in the glory of His presence (1 Thessalonians 4:17), while the lost will suffer eternally in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15); that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully Man, one Person with two natures (1 Timothy 3:16); that He is the only Redeemer of mankind, so that there is salvation in no other name (Acts 4:12); that the death and blood of Christ are the complete and sufficient payment for the sins of the world (Romans 5:8-10; Hebrews 10:10-14); that the Lord Jesus, having died for our sins, was buried, rose again bodily the third day (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), and then ascended to heaven to the right hand of God the Father (Mark 16:19); that salvation is based only on the work of the Son of God on the cross, not on any works, religious rituals, or any other act or goodness within mankind (Ephesians 2:8-9); that once one is born again, he is eternally saved and secure (Romans 8:28-39) and irrevocably changed (2 Corinthians 5:17); and that this salvation is received through repentant faith alone (Mark 1:15; Romans 4:5).

A faithful church will also believe correctly about the future, as recorded in Bible prophecy. It will believe that the Lord Jesus could return at any moment to raise the saved dead and catch up all living believers to be with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 3:10). After the saved are taken to heaven, the unsaved people who were left behind on earth will endure a seven-year period of horrible Divine judgment and tribulation over the earth (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:21; Revelation 6-19). After this seven-year period, Christ will return with His saints, destroy all the wicked who survived the years of tribulation, and reign over a renewed earth for a thousand years (Revelation 19-20; Isaiah 2; Zechariah 14). Following His thousand-year earthly reign, the unsaved dead will be judged and cast into the lake of fire, while the people of God will live forever in the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, God having created a new heaven and earth (Revelation 20:7-22:16). The Lord expects His church to also believe the other truths covered in this seventh Bible study—and everything else that is found in the Scriptures!

While the Savior's congregations are made up of people who are still sinners, so church members will fall short and not be perfect, they will nevertheless take everything that the Word of God says to believe and to do very seriously. The church is to "teach no other doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:3) than that of Christ and the apostles. It is to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3), and "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12). The common idea that there is some tiny body of "essentials" of Christianity, and these are the only doctrines that we are to worry about, while everything else in the Scriptures does not matter, is false. The Lord Jesus said, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these __ __ __ __ __ commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the __ __ __ __ __ in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall __ __ and __ __ __ __ __ *them*, the same shall be called __ __ __ __ __ in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19). Both adding human traditions to the Bible and taking away anything from what God commands us to believe are great evils (Deuteronomy 4:2). A congregation that turns away from true doctrine and practice ceases to be a church of Christ (Revelation 1:20; 2:5). The apostle Paul commanded the preacher Timothy to "Take heed unto __ __ __ __ __ __ __, and unto the __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __; __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Timothy 4:16). Timothy was to carefully guard himself, to make sure that he was right with God, and carefully guard true doctrine. By doing so, he would save or deliver himself and those who heard him preach from the terrible consequences of falling into error. This attitude is what we expect from one of the Lord Jesus' true churches.

V. Faithfulness to Bible practice

In John 13:17, the Lord Jesus said, "If ye __ __ __ __ these things, happy are ye if ye __ __ them." God does want us to know what true doctrine is, certainly—but we are not to just know it, but to put it into practice. This is what the Lord's churches characteristically do. What sorts of actions has the Lord commanded His church to observe?

John 4:23-24 tells us that "the hour cometh, and now is, when the __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father __ __ __ __ __ __ __ such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in __ __ __ __ __ __ and in __ __ __ __ __." The Father sought for us and saved us to make us His "true worshippers." Since, as we saw earlier in this study, the church is His spiritual temple for this age (Ephesians 2:21; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17), and our Lord drew us to Himself "that we should be to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:12), one of the important reasons why God redeemed us is so that we could worship Him in His church! We are certainly to worship God as individuals, but we must do so together in the assembly as well. What does it mean to worship God? It is to give Him the honor and reverence He deserves (Hebrews 12:28). God commands us to worship Him in accordance with His explicit commandment—this is part of worshipping in "truth" (John 4:24). We do not get to offer God whatever we want, but must look at the commandments and examples in Scripture and follow them, without adding or taking away anything. The Lord is pleased with our worship only when we offer Him what He has commanded. This principle can be seen in Leviticus 10:1-2: "And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ before the LORD, which he __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ them __ __ __. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ before the LORD." Nadab and Abihu were the sons of the high priest, Aaron. They had just seen the tremendous blessing of God revealed in the nation of Israel as worship in the tabernacle went on in the way Jehovah had commanded (Leviticus 9). Excited, they thought that the Lord would accept worship of their own devising, and they brought an offering to Him. Their offering is called "strange fire" because it was what Jehovah "commanded them not." Did God accept it? No—He immediately burned them up, and they died! How serious of a sin it is to offer God what we make up instead of only what He has told us! The Lord Jesus Christ repeated this important principle in worship in Matthew 15:9: "In __ __ __ __ they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ of __ __ __." We cannot worship God in church with something that we have instituted ourselves. This is "making the word of God of none effect through [man's] tradition" (Mark 7:13) and "will worship" (Colossians 2:23). God has said, "What thing soever __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ you, observe to __ __ __ __: thou shalt __ __ __ __ __ __ thereto, nor __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ from it" (Deuteronomy 12:32). Violation of this principle is the root of idolatry and false

religion (Deuteronomy 12:31-32; Jeremiah 19:5; Colossians 2:20-23); in fact, since it sets up false views of God and what He wants from us, it violates the second commandment (Exodus 20:4-6). Today many "Christian" groups do not practice this teaching of the Bible; they seek to worship God in their "churches" using things that Christ never commanded His congregation, from incense, holy water, and priests with special garments, to festivals not found in Scripture, from Lent to special healing meetings to rock concerts. Unbiblical "churches" add all sorts of ceremonies, rituals, and human traditions to what the Bible commands in church worship. While God does not usually kill people in these congregations immediately for sinning in this way, as He did Nadab and Abihu, their "worship" is rejected. It still makes the Holy One very angry instead of pleasing Him. In contrast, Christ's true churches take worship very seriously. They have reverence for God and His holy commandments. They want to worship Him just like He has told them to in the Bible (Matthew 28:20).

The Bible shows us that God wants His church to assemble for worship on the first day of the week, Sunday. If churches want to have services on other days as well, or have special meetings sometimes every day of the week, that is just fine (Acts 2:46)—but they must meet on Sunday, the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10). Jesus Christ rose from the dead on Sunday (Mark 16:9), and appeared to His assembled disciples (Matthew 28:8-10; Luke 24:34; John 20:19-23; etc.), His congregation or church. The church met on Sunday on the day of Pentecost (Leviticus 23:15-16; Pentecost was fifty days after a Saturday Sabbath, and so was always on Sunday), and saw Christ's tremendous blessings (Acts 2:1-41). Church offerings were held, and so the church was obviously meeting, "Upon the first *day* of the week" (1 Corinthians 16:2). In Acts 20:7, "upon the __ __ __ __ __ *day* of the __ __ __ __, when the disciples __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight." The evidence of the New Testament is uniformly for church assemblies on Sunday.

There are no New Testament examples of churches assembling to keep the Jewish Sabbath, Saturday. The sabbath was not for all people in all times: it was a sign specifically for the nation of Israel, rather than for the church of Christ (Exodus 31:12-17; Ezekiel 20:10-12). The fact that the sabbath was not enforced from the time of creation until Israel left Egypt demonstrates its special relevance to the Jewish nation (Nehemiah 9:13-14). In Colossians 2:16-17, Paul commanded the church in the city of Colossae, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the __ __ __ __ __ __ __ *days*: Which are a __ __ __ __ __ __ of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ." The members of the church were not keeping the sabbath, or the other Jewish festivals, and Paul commanded them not to allow anyone to judge them for this and order them to do so. The sabbath and the other Jewish holy days were a "shadow" of Jesus Christ and the salvation that He brought in.

Since the Lord Jesus has now come, the picture of salvation, the "shadow" of the sabbath, has been fulfilled (Hebrews 4). Religious organizations that forsake worship on the first day of the week to observe the Jewish sabbath are not following the Bible.

A church of Christ will place great importance upon the Lord's command to "preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2). It will not teach its own opinions or ideas, but boldly preach the Word of God. The preacher will "reprove, rebuke, and exhort" (2 Timothy 4:2). He will not back down or be afraid to teach certain parts of the Bible that many people do not like. A "pastor" who leaves people feeling comfortable about their sin, and seeks to please the ungodly rather than pleasing God and proclaiming "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) is a false teacher (2 Timothy 4:3-4). God also says, "My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer" (Mark 11:17; Isaiah 56:7), so the church of Christ, as the Savior's spiritual temple, practices prayer. Just like individual, private prayer, group prayer in the congregation, where Christ is present in a special way (Revelation 1:13, 20), is very important. Hebrews 10:24-25 commands the church, "And let us consider __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ to __ __ __ __ __ __ __ unto __ __ __ __ and to __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." The members of the Lord's congregations help each other grow in grace and in the knowledge of the great Head of the church (cf. Hebrews 10:25). They encourage each other to be ever closer to their Redeemer. They hold each other accountable to do what is right, and seek to "warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all *men*" and "see that none render evil for evil unto any *man*; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all *men*." (1 Thessalonians 5:14-15). The church will also practice, as already described, the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Music should also be sung to God in the church; Scripture commands, "Let the __ __ __ __ of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in __ __ __ __ __ __ and __ __ __ __ __ and spiritual __ __ __ __ __, singing with grace in your hearts __ __ the __ __ __ __" (Colossians 3:16). Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs should be sung to the Lord. Hymns and spiritual songs should be based on the "word of Christ," teaching and admonishing sound doctrine and practice. They should be rich in content, like the songs in the book of Psalms. (Of course, when singing psalms, rather than hymns, one does not need to worry about the soundness, richness, or accuracy of the content, because the psalms are perfect, having been inspired by God.). The tunes to the songs should not be worldly, fleshly, or sensual. The believer is to "make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts *thereof"* (Romans 13:14), and to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). Worship is not fleshly, but spiritual (John 4:24), so the rhythms of the music should not dominate and appeal to

the body. Nor will godly music be worldly (1 John 2:15-17). Rock, jazz, blues, country-western, pop, and rap songs glorify the devil, lust, and ungodly, worldly evils.[17] Replacing the wicked words of evil music with "Christian" content does not make such songs acceptable to God—He still finds them loathsome and detestable (Deuteronomy 12:30-32). The old, evil song is gone for the child of God. He can say, "[The Lord] hath put a new song in my mouth, *even* praise unto our God" (Psalm 40:3). Ungodly music has no place in God's church—or in the life of the believer the rest of the week.

Indeed, acceptable praise in the Lord's church requires that the members are living holy lives when they are not assembled for public worship. The worship of people living in sin is "an

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[17] Musicians, marketers, and students of these types of music know that their songs are ungodly and against Jesus Christ and the Bible. Rock stars and those who study such music openly declare that its goal is "to change one set of values to another … free minds … free dope … free bodies … free music" (*The Rolling Stone Interviews*, 1971). "Rock music . . . is anti-religious, anti-nationalistic and anti-morality" (John Lennon). "'Rock-and-roll,' itself a blues-music term for sex, suggested rebellion and abandon as much as it did a new style of music when it first jarred adult sensibilities in the 1950s" (*U.S. News & World Report*, October 28, 1985). "If any music has been guilty by association, it is rock music. It would be impossible to make a complete list, but here are a few of the 'associates' of rock: drug addicts, revolutionaries, rioters, Satan worshippers, drop-outs, draft-dodgers, homosexuals and other sex deviates, rebels, juvenile criminals, Black Panthers and White Panthers, motorcycle gangs, blasphemers, suicides, heathenism, voodooism, phallixism, Communism in the United States (Communist Russia outlawed rock music around 1960), paganism, lesbianism, immorality, demonology, promiscuity, free love, free sex, disobedience (civil and uncivil), sodomy, venereal disease, discotheques, brothels, orgies of all kinds, night clubs, dives, strip joints, filthy musicals such as 'Hair' and 'Uncle Meat'; and on and on the list could go almost indefinitely" (Frank Garlock, *The Big Beat)*. "Sex, violence, rebellion—it's all part of rock 'n' roll" (John Mellencamp, *Larson's Book of Rock*). "Rock 'n' Roll . . . is . . . demonic. . . . A lot of the beats in music today are taken from voodoo, from the voodoo drums. If you study music in rhythms, like I have, you'll see that is true . . . I believe that kind of music is driving people from Christ. It is contagious" (Little Richard). "[T]he sudden mingling of so many different tribes produced new variations [of music] like candomble, santeria, and vodun [demonic religion] . . . and out of this severing came jazz, the blues, the backbeat, rhythm and blues, and rock and roll—some of the most powerful rhythms on the planet. . . . It is hard to pinpoint the exact moment when I awoke to the fact that my tradition—rock and roll—did have a spirit side, that there was a branch of the family that had maintained the ancient connection between the drum and the gods [demons]" (Mickey Hart, drummer for *The Grateful Dead)*. "Pop music revolves around sexuality. I believe that if there is anarchy, let's make it sexual anarchy rather than political" (Adam Ant, *From Rock to Rock*). "Many rock performers grew up with country and western music, and its characteristic forms and sounds are close to the ensemble sound of rock—instrumental combinations and techniques are closely parallel. . . . The division between country-and-western and urban pop has now blurred almost to vanishing" (William J. Schafer, *Rock Music*). "As a country artist, I'm not proud of a lot of things in my field. There is no doubt in my mind that we are contributing to the moral decline in America" (Jacob Aranza, *More Rock Country*). "The overwhelming theme of country music is triangle relationships. In addition, lost loves, broken homes, and the glorification of liquor frequently pervade the lyrics of the songs" (David Cloud). "The origin of the word 'jazz' is most often traced back to a vulgar term used for sexual acts. Some of the early sounds of jazz were associated with whore houses and 'ladies of ill repute'" (http://www.jazzhistory/introduction). "'Jazz' (also called 'jass' in its early days), like 'rock and roll' a couple of generations later, had its origins as a slang term for sex; the word's risqué roots no doubt boosted its popularity in that age-old search by hormonal, rebellious young people looking for edgy, exciting new ways to express themselves and, if at all possible, worry their parents as well" (Larry Nager, *Memphis Beat*). For more information, and original sources for these quotations, see "The Character of Rock and Roll Music," "Country Music," "Is There a Connection Between Rock Music and Voodoo or African Paganism?" "Jazz," and other articles on music in the database at http://wayoflife.org, published by Way of Life Literature. Quotes above are taken from the *Fundamental Baptist CD-ROM Library,* ed. David Cloud. London, Ontario: Bethel Baptist Church/Way of Life Literature, 2003).

abomination . . . iniquity . . . [an action Jehovah's] soul hateth . . . a trouble unto [him, so that he is] weary to bear [it]." God wants His people to live (Titus 3:8), talk (Ephesians 4:29), dress (Deuteronomy 22:5; Zephaniah 1:8; 1 Timothy 2:9), think (Philippians 4:8), look (1 Corinthians 11:14-15), and be (1 Corinthians 3:17) holy. When unholy people pray, Jehovah says, "I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear" (Isaiah 1:13-15). Paul writes, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye __ __ __ __ __ __ __ your __ __ __ __ __ __ a __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable __ __ __ __ __ __ __. And be not __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ to this world: but be ye __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." This is what the child of God should do continually—his entire life should be one of holiness, of worship, as he offers himself continually as a spiritual sacrifice to his Father. The fact that worship in church requires a life characterized by holiness is one of the reasons why, as was discussed earlier, the churches of God do not allow people who are not born again and are wicked to become members, and they remove from their membership roll people who turn from God to live in unrepentant sin. Of course, this does not mean that nobody can worship the Lord who has not reached sinless perfection—nobody has that until he is glorified at the return of Christ or at death (1 John 1:8-10). The Spirit often convicts saints of sin in some area of their lives as they listen to preaching, read and meditate upon the Bible, and talk about spiritual things with others. When thus convicted, the new nature God has given believers makes them want to confess and forsake the sin they now realize they have committed.

Churches also worship God through evangelism. Paul said that he was "the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost" (Romans 15:16). Proclaiming the gospel is part of worshipping God. The Bible commands all Christians to "be filled [controlled by] the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). The Holy Spirit will both produce godly character qualities in believers as they follow His leading and surrender to Him (Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 5:9) and give them boldness in giving out the gospel. When the disciples "were all __ __ __ __ __ __ with the Holy Ghost, [then] they __ __ __ __ __ the __ __ __ __ of God with __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __" (Acts 4:31; cf. Acts 1:8). Church members are supposed to testify of Christ with their words and their lives to their family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and other acquaintances (Matthew 5:14-16). They are also supposed to be involved in "go[ing] . . . into all the world" to "preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). The churches in the Bible were filled with Christians who were good examples to people they knew personally, but they did not stop there—they sought to reach everybody. "Daily in the temple [in Jerusalem], and in every house, [the apostles] ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:42). The

apostles were involved in preaching the gospel in public forums, like the temple, synagogues (Acts 13:5), and marketplaces (Acts 17:17)—they sought to get the gospel out to great groups of people at one time. They also preached "in every house" (Acts 5:42). They went house to house trying to reach, one at a time, every single person in their area with the gospel. The apostle Paul taught others how to "publickly [mass evangelism of groups], and from house to house [one-on-one evangelism reaching every household]" preach "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20-21). Evangelism is by no means the responsibility only of church leadership. Acts 8:1, 4 mentions that the membership of the church at Jerusalem, "except the apostles" (v. 1), was scattered on account of persecution. As they "were scattered abroad," they "went every where preaching the word" (v. 4). The normal church members were proclaiming the message of salvation—in Acts 8:1, 4, the apostles, that is, the church leaders, are specifically not in view! A faithful church of Jesus Christ will obey its Lord's command to "Go . . . into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). It will follow the pattern in the Bible and try to reach every single person in the local community using methods like systematic house-to-house evangelism. It will look for and make opportunities to reach groups of people at once, using methods like distributing gospel literature, teaching and offering Bible study courses, and preaching on the streets, in nursing homes, in jails, or wherever else one can find a crowd. It will strive to fill its community with the message of salvation (Acts 5:28), and support church planters to evangelize and establish new churches in other parts of the country and around the world, even "unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:47).

Refusing to evangelize is a great sin. God declares, "When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou __ __ __ __ __ __ him not __ __ __ __ __ __ __, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to __ __ __ __ his __ __ __ __; the same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his __ __ __ __ __ will I __ __ __ __ __ __ __ at __ __ __ __ __ hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ thy soul" (Ezekiel 3:18-19; cf. Acts 20:26; 18:6). If a church fails to fulfill its role in getting out the gospel to the world, God holds it accountable for the blood of the lost souls it failed to evangelize. If you are not faithful to do your part in evangelizing the world, you are likewise guilty of soul-manslaughter—your hands are filled with the blood of lost souls! On the other hand, if you are faithful in spreading the gospel and doing your part to see people are taught the way of salvation, you will receive great eternal reward. "The fruit of the righteous *is* a tree of life; and he that winneth souls *is* wise" (Proverbs 11:30), and "they that be wise shall __ __ __ __ __ as the brightness of the firmament; and they that __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ to __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ as the __ __ __ __ __ for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3). The Lord Jesus commanded His churches to "__ __

ye therefore, and __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ nations [how to be saved; make them disciples], __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ them to __ __ __ __ __ __ __ all things whatsoever I have __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ you" (Matthew 28:19-20). The fact that a faithful congregation will take these orders very seriously is another reason why it is so important to join one of the Lord's churches. Not only is it impossible for a believer who is not a church member to fulfill his role properly in proclaiming the gospel locally and, through church-planters, to "all nations," but he cannot be involved in seeing converts baptized and taught "all things whatsoever" that are in the Bible. Proper evangelism and discipleship is only possible through Christ's church. The Lord Jesus gave His congregations the commission to multiply disciples of His, baptize them, establish them in the faith, and start new assemblies throughout the world. A "church" that is not involved in this work is not one someone who loves the Lord Jesus Christ should be associated with. It is not possible to properly worship God, do His work on earth, or be free from the blood of lost souls, without being part of one of the Lord's faithful churches and diligently working with that congregation to evangelize the world.

A faithful church will not be in religious union with false religious organizations, unbelievers, or even disobedient, compromising Christians. Titus 3:10 commands, "A man that is an __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ after the first and second admonition __ __ __ __ __ __." Scripture commands concerning false teachers, "If there come any unto you, and bring not this [true] doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed [wish them well, greet them, etc.]: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 9-11). Believers are not to support false teachers and false doctrine in any way, but "from such turn away" (2 Timothy 3:1-5). The Lord wants His church to be "holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27), but congregations become defiled and impure (cf. Revelation 17:1-6) when they band together in religious organizations and denominations with those who believe damnable heresies, such as denying the true God, the resurrection of Christ, or the inspiration of Scripture. Those who preach a false "gospel" are "accursed" (Galatians 1:6-9), but many disobedient churches will band together with those under God's wrath and curse! In fact, an obedient church of the Lord will not have fellowship with other congregations or people who are rejecting teachings of Scripture, even if the true gospel is being preached and the disobedient people are born again. 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15 states, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ yourselves from every __ __ __ __ __ __ __ that walketh __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __, and not after the tradition which he received of us. . . . And if any man __ __ __ __ __ __ __ our word by this epistle, __ __ __ __ that man, and have __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ *him* as a __ __ __ __ __ __ __." People who

are not God's enemies, but are brethren in Christ, and churches that teach a true gospel, must still be separated from if they are unwilling to be obedient to things that the Bible teaches. Faithful churches and Christians are to withdraw from and admonish them about their error. "No other doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:3) than what is in the Bible must be allowed in an obedient church.

We have now looked at a number of practices that characterize true and obedient churches. Christ's faithful congregations will serve God in spirit and in truth, worshipping Him in accordance with His commandments, instead of using their own ideas and following traditions not found in the Bible. They praise God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, using music in worship that is not worldly, fleshly, or devilish, but such as is suitable to His holy character. They follow the New Testament pattern and gather for worship on the first day of the week, Sunday, instead of on the Jewish Sabbath. They treasure bold preaching of all the truths in the Bible. They highly value prayer. They practice baptism and the Lord's Supper the Bible way. Members of faithful churches seek to build each other up in the faith. They seek to always follow Christ, rather than hypocritically putting on a show for Sunday while they serve Satan the rest of the week. They testify of Christ with their words and lifestyle to their friends and acquaintances, work to reach every single person in their local area with the gospel, and support church-planting efforts to evangelize the rest of the world. Obedient churches do not join hands with false religion, the lost, or disobedient brethren, but strive to be pure and faithful to Christ in their religious fellowship. They remember that the Lord Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15), and they look forward joyfully to the time when they are together with their Lord, for then He will tell each of His faithful children, "Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:21).

We have studied five distinguishing marks of the Lord Jesus Christ's true and faithful churches. They have the Bible as their only authority for faith and practice. They are self-governing, independent congregations, rejecting all forms of unbiblical hierarchy. They conform to Scripture in their practice of baptism and the Lord's Supper. They believe the doctrines in the Word of God, and they follow Bible practices. Having studied the importance of, definition of, and marks of the church, we now turn to an examination of church history. Have Bible-believing congregations existed since the Lord Jesus Christ started His church in the first century? If so, where were they—and where are they now? Among all the religious organizations that now fill the world, can we identify the true church today?

The Church:
Its History

I. The History of True Churches

The Lord Jesus gave His church many precious promises of continued existence or perpetuity from the first century until the second coming. In Matthew 16:18, Christ promised, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." He told His church, "lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). This is why Ephesians 3:21 reads, "Unto him [God] *be* glory in the __ __ __ __ __ __ by Christ Jesus __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __, world without end. Amen." These churches would be doing God's will until the Savior returned for them. If there ever was a time between the first century and the present day that Biblical churches vanished from the earth, Christ's promise would have failed—which, of course, can never happen!

While Scripture guarantees a continued succession of true churches, it also predicted a great falling away, an apostasy, from the truth. We would therefore expect that most of "Christianity" would not represent the true religion: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall __ __ __ __ __ __ from the __ __ __ __ __, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of __ __ __ __ __ __; Speaking __ __ __ __ in hypocrisy; having their conscience __ __ __ __ __ __ with a hot iron; __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ to __ __ __ __ __, *and commanding* to __ __ __ __ __ __ __ from __ __ __ __ __, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1 Timothy 4:1-3; cf. Acts 20:28-31). What the Bible predicted was fulfilled historically.

Christ's churches endured a period of severe persecution from the first century to the early fourth century. After the last of the apostles died around A. D. 100, false teaching began to rapidly grow among many, so that great numbers of congregations went into apostasy and fell into errors such as salvation by means of baptism and other works. This false "Christianity" united with the Roman empire during the days of the emperor Constantine, who reigned from A. D. 306-337. The union of "church" and State, which was entirely contrary to Scripture (Matthew 22:21), greatly accelerated the moral and spiritual decline of most of Christendom, as pagan Roman practices and beliefs saturated the new Roman State-church. This "Christian" religious organization rejected the Biblical teaching that every congregation is independent and self-governing to adopt a hierarchical form of "church" government modeled after the Roman government. It gradually developed into the medieval Roman Catholic church, which dominated Europe until the sixteenth-century Reformation. (The Roman Catholic church, Protestant groups which attempted to reform it, and other sects within modern Christendom will be examined below in the section "What About Other Churches?") However, the apostasy was not by any means universal. Bible-believing churches and Christians continued to exist, in accordance with Christ's promise. The heretical "Christian" majority persecuted, tortured, and martyred true

believers by the millions. Christ's churches during the dark days of the dominance of Catholicism in the medieval era were given many different names, such as Waldenses, Donatists, Paulicians, Albigenses, and Cathari. However, they were most commonly designated *Anabaptists* ("re-baptizers"), because their Catholic opponents charged that they "re-baptized" those who, having come to genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, left Catholicism to join true churches. Since the Roman State-church was a false religion, and the infant "baptism" which gradually became universal in the Middle Ages was not the true ordinance instituted by the Lord Jesus and confirmed by His apostles, the Anabaptist practice of immersing Catholics who truly received Christ and joined their congregations was not a "re" baptism at all. A false "church" cannot truly administer the church ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and infant "baptism" is really not baptism. During the time of the Reformation and in the following centuries, the prefix *ana* gradually dropped off, and the true churches were simply called *Baptist.* Congregations that believed and practiced like modern Bible-believing Baptist churches have existed since the days of their Founder and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, until today.

Non-Baptist historians, both Catholic and Protestant, have admitted that Baptists by no means originated at the time of the Reformation, but have existed from antiquity:

The Catholic cardinal Hosius, writing at the time of the Reformation, stated that "were it not for the fact that the Anabaptists have been grievously tormented and cut off with the knife during the past 1200 years, they would swarm greater than all the Reformers" (Hosius, *Letters Apud Opera,* pgs. 112-113).

The Dutch Reformed historians A. Ypeij and J. J. Dermount wrote, "We have now seen that the Baptists, who were formerly called Anabaptists . . . were the original Waldenses, and have long in history received the honor of that origin. On this account the Baptists may be considered as the only Christian community which has stood since the days of the Apostles, and as a Christian society which has preserved pure the doctrines of the Gospel through all ages" (*Geschiedenis der Netherlandsche Hervomke Kerk, I,* pg. 148).

The Methodist scholar John Clark Ridpath wrote, "I should not readily admit that there was a Baptist church as far back as 100 AD, though without doubt there were Baptists then, as all Christians were then Baptists" (W. A. Jarrell, *Baptist Church Perpetuity,* pg. 59).

The Lutheran J. L. von Mosheim wrote, "the origin of . . . the Anabaptists . . . is lost in the remote depths of antiquity. . . . Before the rise of Luther and Calvin, there lay concealed in almost all the countries of Europe, persons who adhered tenaciously to the principles of the modern Dutch Baptists" (*Institute of Ecclesiastical History,* vol. 2, pgs. 119-120).

The Quaker historian Robert Barclay wrote, "the rise of the Anabaptists took place prior to the Reformation of the Church of England, and there are also reasons for believing that on the Continent of Europe small hidden Christian societies, who have held many of the opinions of the

Anabaptists, have existed from the time of the Apostles" (*Inner Life of the Societies of the Commonwealth,* pgs. 11-12).

The founder of the "Christian Church," "Disciples of Christ," and "Church of Christ" denominations, Alexander Campbell, stated, "From the apostolic age to the present time, the sentiments of Baptists have had a continued chain of advocates, and public documents of their existence in every century can be produced" (*McCalla-Campbell Debate,* pgs. 378-379).

Naturally, Baptists also affirm their own succession. The famous Baptist, Charles H. Spurgeon, stated, "We believe that the Baptists are the original Christians. We did not commence our existence at the Reformation, we were reformers before Luther or Calvin were born; we never came from the Church of Rome, for we were never in it, but we have an unbroken line up to the Apostles themselves" (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit,*1861, pg. 225).[18]

God has kept His promise! True churches, ones that believe the doctrines and follow the practices we have learned about from the Scriptures in these seven Bible studies, have indeed existed in every generation from the first century until now. They are found today among those churches called *Baptist.* Baptist churches are the true churches of Jesus Christ.[19]

II. What About Other Churches?

Baptist churches fulfill all the qualifications given in Scripture for the congregations of the Lord. They teach Biblical doctrine and follow Biblical practice. They match the promise of Christ to have preserved His church from the time that He founded it to the end of the world. No other religious group fulfills the requirements of Scripture for true churches. All other groups hold to a variety of false teachings. All other groups originated after the first century.

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[18] These quotes are taken from *The History of Baptists,* Douglas Hammett, Emmaus, PA: Challenge Press, 2004, pg. 9-10. For more information on the history of Christ's churches, please ask us for a free copy of *The Trail of Blood: Following the Christians Down Through the Centuries, or The History of Baptist Churches from the Time of Christ, their Founder, to the Present Day,* J. M. Carroll. This excellent resource also provides extensive sources for those who wish to do even further study.

[19] While Christ's churches are Baptist churches, not every church that has the name "Baptist" on its sign really follows the Bible and practices the one true religion. Just as the Scriptures repeatedly warn of false prophets and teachers (1 John 4:1; 2 Peter 2:1; Matthew 7:15), so today false teachers control some churches that attempt to deceive people and call themselves Baptist, although they have nothing to do with the teachings of the Bible. Generally, Bible-believing Baptist churches are styled "Independent, Fundamental" Baptists, while compromising or false "Baptist" churches are found within various groups that have given up church independence and joined denominational conventions, such as the Southern Baptist Convention ("Southern Baptists,"), the American Baptist Convention, National Baptist Convention, etc. You can have confidence that the Baptist church that gave you this Bible study is a true church of Christ, and, if you are born again, you can happily join yourself to it and serve the Lord in it. If you are too far away from the congregation that has provided you this study to worship there, please indicate in the appropriate section at the end of this Bible study that you wish to attend a true church in your area, and we will help you find one.

We will now state the founder, and sample the false teachings, of many of the religious divisions, sects, and cults within Christendom.[20] It will not be possible to cover every single religious group, nor will the heresies of the sects covered be studied comprehensively. Furthermore, varying degrees of divergent belief are tolerated in these groups; within some, the variation is very great. We welcome questions about any of the material covered here and will gladly provide further information about these religions to all who request it.

Roman Catholicism. Founder: The emperor Constantine united "church" and State, A. D. 325; first real Pope, Leo I (A. D. 440-461). Heresies: Tradition is equal to the Bible; the Apocrypha is added to the Bible; the "infallible" decrees of the Pope are added to the Bible; idolatry is committed by worshipping Mary, other dead people, and images; idolatry is committed by worshipping bread in the Mass; salvation is received by following the seven sacraments and doing good works; infant "baptism" is practiced; "baptism" by sprinkling or pouring is practiced; the Lord's Supper is supposedly eating Christ's human flesh and drinking His literal blood; the new birth and holiness are not required for church membership; the eternal security of the believer's salvation is rejected; a hierarchy of priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, popes, etc. is created; most believers allegedly do not go to heaven right away but go to an imaginary place called purgatory where they get tortured; numerous other heresies are accepted, which have gradually increased in number over time.[21]

Eastern Orthodoxy (Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, etc.). Founder: Michael Cerularius, A. D. 1054. Heresies: Very similar to those of Roman Catholicism, but without an "infallible" Pope.

Lutheranism. Founder: Martin Luther, A. D. 1517. Heresies: idolatry is committed by teaching that Christ's human body fills the universe; salvation is received by means of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; the eternal security of the believer is denied; infant "baptism" is practiced; "baptism" by sprinkling or pouring is practiced; in the Lord's Supper Christ's human body and blood are supposedly literally consumed; the new birth and holiness are not required for church membership; a hierarchy in church government is created.

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[20] The dates mentioned below are sometimes approximate, because some denominations emerged over a period of time. Also, human founders listed were often associated with other prominent individuals in the development of new groups.

[21] Dates for the origination of various Catholic heresies: Priests began to wear special clothing, A. D. 500/ Prayers offered to Mary, dead saints, and angels, A. D. 600/ Bishop of Rome assumed the title of Pope, A. D. 607/ Power of Popes over civil government, A. D. 750/ Worship of the cross, images, and relics, A. D. 788/ Marriage of Priests forbidden, A. D. 1079/ Rosary beads invented, A. D. 1090/ Sale of Indulgences, A. D. 1190/ Sacrifice of Mass, A. D. 1215/ Auricular confession of sins to a priest, A. D. 1215/ Worship of the bread used in the Mass, A. D. 1220/ Purgatory proclaimed, A. D. 1439/ Tradition held equal to Bible, A. D. 1545/ Apocryphal books added to the Bible, A. D. 1546/ Mary said to be completely sinless, A. D. 1854/ Infallibility of the Pope, A. D. 1870/ Bodily assumption of Mary to heaven, A. D. 1950/ Mary proclaimed the "Mother of the Church," A. D. 1965.

Anglicanism/Episcopalianism. Founder: Henry VIII, A. D. 1534. Heresies: salvation is received by means of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; salvation is by works; infant "baptism" is practiced; "baptism" by sprinkling or pouring is practiced; the new birth and holiness are not required for church membership; an episcopal form of hierarchy in church government is created.

Presbyterian/Reformed. Founder: John Calvin, A. D. 1534. Heresies: salvation is by means of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; infant "baptism" is practiced; "baptism" by sprinkling or pouring is practiced; the new birth and holiness are not required for church membership; A Presbyterian form of hierarchy in church government is created.

Methodism. Founder: John Wesley, A. D. 1740. Heresies: salvation is by means of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; eternal security is denied; infant "baptism" is practiced; "baptism" by sprinkling or pouring is practiced; the new birth and holiness are not required for church membership; A hierarchy in church government is created.

Christian Church/Disciples of Christ/Church of Christ. Founder: Alexander Campbell, A. D. 1830. Heresies: salvation is by baptism and by good works; the imputation of Adam's sin and the full sinfulness of man is denied; eternal security is denied.

Charismatic churches/Pentecostalism.[22] Founder: Charles Parham, A. D. 1901. Heresies: The sole authority of Scripture is denied or undermined by adding new so-called prophecies, visions, etc.; the devil is worshipped through so-called tongues speaking and other demonic miracles; some Pentecostals commit idolatry by denying the Trinity (Oneness Pentecostalism); eternal security is denied; worldly, fleshly "worship" is practiced.

Bible Church/"Non-denominational" Church/Community Church. Founder: William McCarrell, A. D. 1930. Heresies: The diversity of belief among these churches is so great that they cannot be generally classified. However, if one went through these Bible studies with any particular one of them, they would deviate from Scripture in some way. They also were started some 1,900 years after Christ's church was.

Seventh Day Adventism. Founder: Ellen G. White, A. D. 1844. Heresies: The sole authority of Scripture is denied by adding the "inspired" visions of Ellen White; salvation by works based on Christ's coming to a "heavenly sanctuary" in A. D. 1844 is taught; eternal security is denied; the Lord's day for worship is rejected for the Jewish Sabbath; hell is denied.

Watchtower Society ("Jehovah's Witnesses"). Founder: Charles Taze Russell, A. D. 1884. Heresies: The sole authority of Scripture is denied by ascribing a "prophetic" role to the

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[22] These denominations include the Assemblies of God, Church of God in Christ, Pentecostal Apostolic Church, Vineyard Church, United Pentecostal Church, etc. For more information on the errors of the charismatic and Pentecostal movements, please request a free copy of the tract, "A Scriptural Analysis of the Charismatic Movement," by Kent Brandenburg.

Governing Body in New York City, and by making up its own corrupt version of the Bible (the *New World Translation*); idolatry is committed by teaching that the Lord Jesus Christ is not Jehovah but Michael the Archangel, a second and lesser god; idolatry is committed by teaching that the Holy Spirit is not God, but an impersonal force like electricity; the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is denied; salvation by works is taught; the eternal security of the believer is rejected; the fact that saved dead are in heaven is rejected; eternal punishment in hell is rejected; the myth that Jesus Christ came back to earth in A. D. 1914 is taught; many other heresies are affirmed.

Mormonism. Founder: Joseph Smith, A. D. 1820. Heresies: The sole authority of Scripture is denied by claiming that the *Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants,* and *Pearl of Great Price* are also the Word of God; the doctrine is advocated that outside of their "church," which is led by a "prophet" who still receives new revelation, there is no salvation; salvation by baptism and good works is taught; the one true God is denied by teaching that there are many gods, and that a faithful male Mormon and his wife can become a god and goddess and rule their own planet; the blasphemy is taught that God the Father was once a man who became a god like Mormons can today; the blasphemy is taught that Jesus Christ and Satan are brothers; the lie that God the Father has a body of flesh and bones is advocated; the vile notion that Jesus Christ was conceived by the sexual union of their "God the Father" and Mary is advanced; many other sick and abominable blasphemies and heresies are advocated.

The fact is that only true Baptist churches meet the Biblical requirements set out for the church of Christ. No other religious group teaches everything in the Bible. Also, all non-Baptist "churches" were started after the first century, when Christ started His church. The Catholic denomination split from true churches in the early centuries as it went off into apostasy. Eastern Orthodoxy and the various Protestant denominations split from Roman Catholicism. Numerous cult groups and new denominations have sprung up after the time of the Reformation. All of these groups show by their disobedience to Bible doctrine and practice, and their origin centuries after the life of Christ, that they are not His church. They are all guilty of schism, of separating themselves from the one church the Lord Jesus founded. People who are members of these religious organizations are not members of the church of Christ. They do not enjoy the wonderful benefits and blessings the Savior promised those in His congregations. Their members are unable to offer God the worship that He has willed to receive in His church. They are unable to Biblically baptize or practice the Lord's Supper. The existence and religious rituals of such false "churches" offend God, rather than pleasing Him. Christians should have nothing to do with these organizations.

The Church:

God's Will for My Life

Over the course of this Bible study, we have learned many things about the Lord's church. We learned it is extremely important—Christ has a special love for His church; not worshipping in it is disobedience to plain commands of Scripture; characteristic non-attendance is a mark of the unconverted; it is the place where we can grow under God-ordained leadership and be protected from false teaching; and it is the place of the Savior's special presence, for Christ's congregation is His body, temple, and bride. A believer cannot be obedient to His Redeemer without serving faithfully in His church. In addition to all the benefits already mentioned, the Christian is not able to strengthen and be strengthened by his companions in the assembly, receive Biblical baptism, participate in the Lord's Supper, and properly fulfill his role in the work of evangelism and discipleship, without joining the church of God.

We also learned that the word *church* means *assembly* or *congregation.* The church of Christ is an assembly of baptized believers, organized to carry out the Lord's work. A church is not a building where people meet for worship, or a religious denomination. The church is not made up of all believers everywhere all together—that is the family of God. Christ's church is a particular, local, visible congregation, not something universal or invisible. Recognizing that a *church* is an *assembly,* we were ready to look at the marks that distinguish Christ's assembly from other types of assemblies.

We then studied five marks of the Lord's church: the Bible is its sole authority, it is a self-governing, independent congregation, it properly practices baptism and communion, it is faithful to other Biblical doctrine, and it conforms to other Biblical practices. The Bible is the church's only authority for faith and practice because every word of Scripture was inspired and perfectly preserved by God. Since the traditional Hebrew and Greek texts, which are faithfully translated into English in the King James Bible, represent the perfectly preserved text of the inspired Scriptures, faithful churches use the King James Bible instead of the many modern "Bible" versions that are filled with Satanic corruptions. Because Scripture teaches that, in submission to Christ's headship, the members of the assembly have ultimate decision-making authority, true churches are self-governing, independent congregations. The only two offices in the congregation are pastors—who are also called elders, bishops, or overseers—and deacons. Pastors and deacons must meet specific and strict spiritual qualifications. Church membership is only for those who have been born again and are living a life consistent with the new birth. Believers join congregations by baptism. This ordinance is performed properly when a church immerses a Christian in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baptism pictures the Lord Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection and the saint's identification with Him in dying to his old life of sin and rising to new life in Christ. Neither baptism nor the Lord's Supper is a sacrament

that takes away sin—one's sins must be paid for before he can properly participate in either ordinance. The Lord's Supper is celebrated when the members of a church, having examined themselves to make sure they are right with God, partake of unleavened bread and grape juice in remembrance of Christ. Nothing happens to the bread and the fruit of the vine—they do not change into anything else in the ordinance. Christ's congregations are also faithful to other Biblical doctrines. They take everything taught in the Bible, from the nature of God to the way of salvation to the details of Christ's return, very seriously. They earnestly contend for truth and fight against error.

Obedient churches are also faithful to Biblical practice. They assemble the first day of the week to worship God in spirit and in truth, in accord with His explicit commandment, and not adding the traditions of men. They boldly preach the Bible, are faithful in prayer, and encourage their members in righteousness, recognizing that a righteous life is central to acceptable worship. They praise the Lord in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, using holy tunes and rejecting worldly, fleshly, and devilish music. They also serve their Savior by faithful and consistent evangelism, seeking to reach every single person in their area with the gospel and to establish new churches in their country and around the world. They strive to maintain their purity by avoiding religious affiliations with false teachers, unbelievers, and disobedient and compromising Christians. The sole authority of Scripture, church independence, proper practice of baptism and communion, and faithfulness to Bible doctrine and practice are clear marks which distinguish Christ's church from "Christian" groups founded by man.

Finally, we examined the history of the church of God. We learned that the Savior promised His church a continued existence from the time of its founding until the end of the age, despite the fact that many would fall away into error. The apostasy associated with the union of the pagan Roman government with the "church" of the fourth century developed into the medieval Roman Catholic denomination, while true churches rejected the union of "church" and State and the heresies of Catholicism. They Scripturally baptized those that truly believed the gospel and came to be known as *Anabaptists* because of their stand for the truth on baptism and other Biblical doctrine. Despite terrible persecution by the "Christian" majority, their assemblies continued to exist through the centuries to the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, when the prefix *ana* was gradually dropped and the true churches were simply called *Baptist.* Non-Baptist historians confirm the truth of the Baptist claim that their churches have existed since the first century. All other religious groups—Catholics, Protestants, and modern cults—fail to believe and practice everything in the Bible. These religious denominations also all started many, many years after the Lord Jesus founded His church in the first century. History confirms the teaching of Scripture—modern Bible-believing Baptist churches are the true churches of Jesus Christ, practicing the one true religion.

In John 14:23, the Lord Jesus said, "If a man __ __ __ __ me, he will __ __ __ __ my words: and my Father will love him, and __ __ will __ __ __ __ unto __ __ __, and make our __ __ __ __ __ with him." Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? You do not, and cannot, love Him unless you have been born again. Have you come to Him as a helpless sinner, in repentance trusting in His blood and righteousness alone for mercy, as explained in Bible study #5? If you have not, then the truths about the church you have learned in this Bible study, while certainly helpful to you, as is every teaching of Scripture, will not keep you from eternal damnation. You should receive Christ as your Lord and Savior immediately.

If you have been born again, God has given you a new heart (Hebrews 8:10; Ezekiel 36:26-27), and you do love the Lord Jesus Christ. This love will lead you to "keep [Christ's] words" (John 14:23), and you will consequently enjoy fellowship with your loving heavenly Father, your Savior, and the Holy Spirit, as God dwells within you and abides with you. He who has given you eternal life, and who has given His very Son to die for and redeem you from your awful, despicable, damnation-deserving sins, commands you to join His church and serve Him there. This is what the Bible teaches Christians do (Acts 2:41, 47). If you wish to be obedient to Christ, you must attend, be baptized into, and serve in His true church. While church membership definitely cannot take away your sin—you must be born again before you can join the Lord's church—Scripture provides no grounds for assurance of salvation to those who reject baptism and church membership (1 John 2:19). If you have not been going to any sort of church, you should find out where a good Baptist church is, be baptized, and begin to wholeheartedly serve the Lord there. Contact us, and we will help you find one. If you have been going to worship at some other kind of "Christian" religious organization, or are a member of any other kind of "church" than a Bible-believing Baptist church, one that teaches and practices everything we have learned in these Bible studies, you should immediately forsake your man-made religion and unite with the type of church Jesus Christ started. God must come first—before your own desires, before the traditional way you have done things, before your family, before everyone and everything. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:37-39). You agreed unconditionally to follow Christ when you repented—now it is time to put the truth into practice. 2 Timothy 2:5 reads, "And if a man also strive for masteries, *yet* is he __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __, except he __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __." You do not get to serve the Lord Jesus any way you want—you lose out on eternal reward unless you serve Him "lawfully," in the way that He has commanded. Consider the blessing promised to obedience, and the judgment promised to disobedience, stated in Matthew 10:32-33: "Whosoever therefore shall __ __ __ __ __ __ __

__ __ before __ __ __, him will __ confess __ __ __ __ before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall __ __ __ __ __ __ before men, him will __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ before my Father which is in heaven." Unite yourself with Christ's church immediately!

Review Quiz For Bible Study #7

1.) God does not care if we go to church, as long as we are saved and on our way to heaven. True False

2.) The word *church* means *congregation* or *assembly.* The church of Christ is an assembly of baptized believers, organized to carry out the Lord's work. True False

3.) All believers in the whole world are the one universal and invisible church. True False

4.) All English Bible versions are basically the same; we can use whichever one we want, for they are all equally accurate and faithful translations of the original writings. True False

5.) In Bible times, every congregation was independent of every other one, and each church had the authority to run its own affairs. True False

6.) Bishops are the highest rank office in the church; elders are the second highest, and pastors are the third rank. The three are definitely not the same. True False

7.) Baptism must be by immersion, and it is only for those who have believed in Christ, not for infants. True False

8.) The bread and fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper become the literal body and blood of Jesus Christ. True False

9.) Church membership is restricted to obedient saved people. True False

10.) Jesus Christ will rule over the earth for a thousand years after He returns. True False

11.) We can add our own ideas to what Scripture commands us to offer God in worship, and He will be pleased by whatever we decide to offer Him, as long as we are sincere. True False

12.) Christians and churches should always be united with fellow believers, even if these believers are disobeying Scripture. Separation from anyone who is born again is wrong. True False

13.) Because of the power of the devil, the churches of Christ ceased to exist after several centuries. After a period of time when there were no true churches on earth, a godly man restarted the church, and these restored churches exist even to this very day. True False

14.) Only Bible-believing Baptist churches have all the marks of true churches today. Churches that believe like modern Baptist churches have existed ever since the days of Christ and the apostles. True False

Request for Further Material

___ I have returned the seventh Bible study to you with the answer blanks filled in and answered the review quiz questions. Please send me my certificate of completion for the Bible study course.

___ I would like to continue to study the Bible. Please enroll me in the Bible study course, *Disciplines for Disciples of Christ.*

___ I would like more information on the history of true churches from Christ's day to the present. Please send me a free copy of *The Trail of Blood: Following the Christians Down Through the Centuries, or The History of Baptist Churches from the Time of Christ, their Founder, to the Present Day,* by J. M. Carroll.

___ I have questions about the Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Please send me a free copy of the tract, "A Scriptural Analysis of the Charismatic Movement."

___ I have questions about the teaching that one must be baptized in order to be forgiven of sin. Please send me a free copy of the book *Heaven Only For The Baptized? The Gospel of Christ vs. Pardon through Baptism,* by Thomas Ross.

____ I have questions about the _____ religious denomination within Christendom; please provide me with more information about it.

____ I would like more information about the issue of Bible texts and versions and the superiority of the King James Bible to modern translations of Scripture.

____ Please send me _____, a work mentioned as available in a previous Bible study.

___ I would like to meet with or talk to someone in person. I have put information in the spaces below (phone number, times available, etc.) to contact me.

____ I would like to become a member of a Bible-believing Baptist church. Please help me to find one in my area. I have provided my address below.

Please use the space below to tell us if you go to church. If you do not, please let us know if you plan to start regularly attending the services of a good Baptist church. If you already attend some kind of assembly, please tell us the name and the religious denomination connected with this church, how long you have been affiliated with it, and how regularly you attend its services. If it is not a Bible-believing Baptist church, please tell us if you intend to leave it and join one of Christ's churches. If you do not, please state the reasons why. Also, if you are not saved, please tell us why you still have not repented and believed the gospel. If you have been born again but have not already explained the way you were converted at the end of a previous Bible study, please also explain in the space below when and how you came to receive Christ. You can also ask any other question related to the Bible. Please record in addition any changes of address, as well as the names and addresses of people you know who might also like to do this Bible study. Congratulations on completing all seven Bible studies! We are so glad to have been able to study the Bible with you.

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