

# Servants' NEWS

Vol. 9, No. 1 A newsletter for servants of the Almighty Eternal Creator, wherever they may be Jan/Feb 2003

## Beholding the Lord in Our Presence

by Jerry Laws

Many times during my personal Bible study, I will ask our Father for His guidance in the direction that He wants me to go during this time. Not too long ago I was directed to the book of Acts, chapter 2. It was not Pentecost season, when we traditionally cover this chapter, so as I was reading it once again I kept looking for something new for me.

It was in the middle of Peter's  
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*Beauty and majesty — one quick look at God's creation can produce inspiration and awe—with no need to understand exactly how it works. A wealthy educated person, a poor person or a little child—anyone with the spirit that God put in man—can experience the beauty and majesty of His work.*

## Two Aspects of God

These two articles represent two important aspects of God. On the one hand, He works in a spiritual way (John 4:21). He gave all people a spirit so that we can understand the spiritual “things of man” (1Cor 2:11; Eccl 12:7). These things include the meaning of life, morality, beauty, history, eternity, art, musical harmony, drama, etc. These are things that people understand, and animals do not. The understanding of these things and the understanding of God Himself is greatly enhanced by the Spirit of God (1Cor 2:10–11, John 14:26). The article at left is about using the Spirit of God to control the big issues of our life.

On the other hand, God is also the Creator of precise physical details. He made the vastness of the universe and the complexity of life on earth—and He did an unsurpassable job (Gen 1:31; Eccl 3:11). Also, by His Spirit, God gives people the ability to do detailed work and create beautiful things (Ex 31:2–5). The article at right explains some of the technical details of how laws work. Someone must know and apply these principles for a congregation or community to function.

— Norman Edwards

## The Mechanics of the Law and Its Biblical Application

by Ray Serrano

“He who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination” (Prov 28:9).

Throughout history and as far back as the first century A.D., the word “law” has been **indiscriminately** used when addressing the different rules of human behavior. The commandments, statutes, and ordinances have been lumped together when addressing issues relating to the law.

Although having the same weight as law, they are significantly different. The definition of “law” can and does include a wide spectrum of operatives, forcing the use of different categories, divisions and subdivisions in order to

*Continued on page 22*



**Superior technology** — this photo is a cell Mitochondrion, the powerhouse that runs living cells. This is just one of the millions of complex parts that keep alive the millions of self-replicating species on our planet. Fifty years ago, some biologists hoped that with better instruments they would one day unlock the secrets of cells and learn to create life. The better instruments now exist and we have learned much about cell function—and also learned that they are so complex that we may never know it all.

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# Truckers Bible Study

Oak Grove, Mo.  
#114-115



*The Trucker's Bible Study is conducted weekly at the Texaco truck stop on I-70, Oak Grove, Missouri, by Arlo Gieselman, often assisted by Lenny Cacchio, the writer of this series.*

**December 15, 2002**

I want to tell you about an experience that one of the truck drivers mentioned today. He said he was "saved" in July, but his story reminds me of the phrase, "Hound of Heaven". That was a term which C. S. Lewis used to describe God and how He stays on our trail.

The man's father was a Baptist preacher, but died early in the young boy's life. He had never really paid much attention to religion. He was married, and eventually he and his wife separated for a while then came back to together. They have two daughters, one of whom is 13.

Some time ago the youngest daughter started going to a church that has a very good youth program, and this summer they invited the parents to a presentation. It was like a light went on in his head, and he determined that he was going to start going to church. He couldn't figure out why his wife resisted, until she confessed to him that while they were separated, she had started attending church but had given it up when they reconciled. She was wracked by guilt. They got past that hurdle and now attend as a family.

Here is a case where the young daughter was the evangelist in the family. Her dedication set an example for the parents. I don't know about mom, but the dad was like a sponge today, absorbing everything and asking questions. Effective youth ministry should draw unchurched adults, and it worked in this case. Sadly, we have no such experience with such in the COGs (with the exception of CG7), and in fact have institutional resistance against it.

At least three out of the four men today are relatively new to the Bible. One man said that he has struggled with alcohol for most of his adult life, but his wife was patient with him and prayed for him, and now is well on his way to getting some control of his life.

A third driver told me that he has had his nose in the Bible for two

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Vol. 9, No. 1

Jan/Feb 2003

The purpose of Church Bible Teaching Ministry is to continue the work of the Church that was started by Jesus Christ (Yeshua the Messiah) and His Apostles in the first century. This work involves expounding the truth of the Bible by means of preaching, teaching, writing and music as well as taking positive action to help and serve other believers and all people of the world. CBTM and those people who work within it are just a few of many parts of the Church, which is the body of Christ. *Servants' News* is a publication of CBTM.

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New articles and corrections to previous articles will be considered for printing. We do not return writings sent to us, so please make copies of anything you need to keep. Send to:

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Most Scripture quotes are from the New King James Version

**Circulation mailed from the USA: 1921;**

**Internationally reprinted: 127; e-mail: 242**

*Servants' News* is published bimonthly (six times per year). Issues are regularly sent free to people who request the publication and are genuinely interested in it. *Servants' News* is published by Church Bible Teaching Ministry (3690 Bath Rd, Perry, Michigan—this is not a mailing address). CBTM reserves the right to refuse service to anyone for any reason. Periodical postage paid at Perry, Michigan (USPS 016-995, ISSN 1522-0621). Postmaster: send address changes to *Servants' News*, PO Box 107, Perry, Michigan 48872-0107.

# Security In Christ

by Jerry Laws

Leaving a church organization can be a stressful and often confusing transition. Each one who does it usually has some significant experience to relate. Hopefully, we are now making progress in our spiritual lives.

For me personally, it has been 25 years since my departure from an institutional organization, and the mindset that was included. Looking back on that experience now, I'm very grateful for the many, many positive experiences as well as the correct spiritual teaching which I received. I was called into this experience by God, and I was also called out of it when the time was right for me. Since God works with His children based on their needs, it must have been what I needed. I hope you can also see God's hand in your personal experience. If you cannot right at this point, be patient in your well-doing and God will reveal it to you.

As time has progressed, I have been unlearning some of the misinformation I had previously accepted, as well as learning to see the Scriptures more clearly. It's so refreshing when the fog of confusion is cleared away by the light of God.

Along this road I have come to one specific conclusion regarding the adversary; wherever God has a point of truth, Satan will often place many counterfeits around it, and he doesn't care which counterfeit we accept, they all result in confusion. The Law/Grace controversy is an example. I found it more than interesting—it was **very revealing** to see how one organization so steeped in the Law, misapplying it to control the people, and then within a relatively few short years managed to subtly misapply the concept of Grace. The result was great confusion for many people. Again, the adversary did not care which counterfeit of truth the believers bought into, it allowed both truths to be obscured in the fog of the many counterfeits.

**But make no mistake about it, Law and Grace are truth.**

Of course this controversy of Law and/or Grace has been around for centuries, some of us have just been exposed to a more current and personal episode.

With all this being said, perhaps we can now take a fresh look at one portion of Grace, specifically the aspect of our security in Christ.

The believer who does not realize that he is eternally secure in Christ (**a birth truth for babes**) is certainly not going to be able to trust Him for emancipation from sin and maturity of growth. Those who begin weakly, and are not instructed concerning their real position in Christ are apt to remain weaklings. They may be very active, but the movement is back and forth and sideways, with rarely any upward spiritual progress and abiding growth. For the most part, they subsist on experiences and so-called blessings. They seem to go from one crisis to another, never really settling down to consider Christ risen as the only source of their life here and now (Gal 2:20; Heb 5:9).

Most of us have probably noticed the **if/then** proposition being used in Scripture: if you believe, then you may have eternal life; if you obey, then you will be blessed, etc. Grace is conditional upon our believing, according to John 3:16. Faith and believing are two words very closely tied. Faith can be defined as understanding and trusting, whilst believing is a verb, an action word, and has to do with the application of what we understand and trust.

Seeing and acknowledging our complete and eternal security in Jesus Christ is one of the building blocks of true spiritual growth. This is a "Faith" work into which we have been called, and our security is based on two conditional aspects of faith. As both aspects begin to be comprehended and personally appropriated by the believer, it is then that these proofs of

## Down-trodden Philadelphians?

by Norman Edwards

Over the centuries, many church groups have claimed to be the "Philadelphian church" (Rev 3:7-13). There is little criticism of that church and it is promised protection from "the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world" (Rev 3:10). Of the "seven churches" (Rev 2, 3), only the only other one that is not corrected is Smyrna, but it suffers great trials (Rev 2:10). So thousands of people have diligently stayed in a church organization that promised its members that they were the present-day fulfillment of the Philadelphia church.

Oddly enough, many of the groups that have claimed to be the "Philadelphian church" have also claimed to be the main group powerfully doing God's work. Is that how the church at Philadelphia is described? **Or does its description better fit small groups of down-trodden believers struggling to follow God?** Let us reread those verses to see exactly what is said to the church in Philadelphia.

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens'" (Rev 3:7)

Christ's first statement to each church is about Himself—what He does for that church (Rev 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). For example, those in Smyrna who were about to be martyred needed to remember that Christ "was dead, and came to life". It is not the church in Philadelphia that **has** the key of David or opens and shuts doors, but they are **reminded** that Christ does these things. The meaning of this verse is explained in the book of Isaiah:

"The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he

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*Continued overleaf*

eternal security can be imparted with us.

**If** you recognize in the Word of Truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior because He is God the Son who became the Son of Man, and as such bore in His body the sins of the world; and

**If** you rest in Him, in self-surrender for fellowship, relying with complete confidence on Him alone for deliverance from the guilt and penalty of our sins and from the power of indwelling sin;

**Then** there are some twelve proofs that you can never be lost:

**1.** You can never be lost because in the sure purpose of God you are a container of His mercy and will finally be conformed to the image of His Son:

“that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory” (Rom 9:23).

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom 8:29).

**2.** You can never be lost because God’s love for you, supremely expressed at Calvary, can now be revealed much more, and so accomplish His every desire for you:

“But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him, for while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom 5:8–10).

**3.** You can never be lost because God’s infinite power is no longer hindered by your sins, but can wholly keep you safe, for the blood of Christ still removes your guilt:

“and if anyone sins we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1Jn 2:1).

**4.** You can never be lost because of His delight in His Son; God can never reject the prayer of the Son asking the Father to keep those whom He has given Him:

“I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours... Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in

the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are” (John 17:9, 11).

**5.** You can never be lost because the death of the Son, having a value equivalent to the punishment demanded for all our sins, has also paid for sins we now commit.

“There is now therefore no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus... Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us” (Rom 8:1, 34).

**6.** You can never be lost because, by the resurrection of Christ, God has broken our connection with Adam and joined us to Christ for acceptance and life:

“And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions... present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead” (Col 2:13; Rom 6:13).

**7.** You can never be lost because, although our sins could condemn us to death, Christ as our advocate continually defends us:

“For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us... but now once at the consummation of the ages, He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb 9:24, 26).

**8.** You can never be lost because Christ ever lives to make intercession for you, Satan has no power to unsave you:

“He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25).

**9.** You can never be lost because the Holy Spirit has taken over your body as His personal permanent home:

“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever” (John 14:16).

**10.** You can never be lost because the Holy Spirit has planted in you the very life of God, making God your real Father, born of God:

“But as many as receive Him to them

He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His Name, who were born not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12–13).

**11.** You can never be lost because the Holy Spirit has now united you with Christ and you are a very part of Himself:

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1Cor 12:13).

**12.** You can never be lost because the Holy Spirit in you is the seal that your salvation is a finished transaction:

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30).

Some people who casually read over this information may form the idea that it is teaching a “once saved, always saved” doctrine (perhaps a symptom of previous indoctrination) and may feel such a belief of security in Christ results in lawlessness. But what these people fail to grasp is that the believer who truly stands in the grace position of eternal security in Christ, is the one who most fully fears God and hates sin. And hates sin for what it is, not just for its consequences. Moreover, his is not a fear of losing God’s love, but of offending and grieving it.

“But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared” (Ps 130:4). The fear of the secured believer is a reverential trust coupled with a hatred of evil: “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil” (Prov 8:13). “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in this present age” (Tit 2:11–12). Grace banishes all guesswork and gives one assurance, the law keeps one guessing. “Are we doing it right enough to obtain eternal security?”

The truth of security holds the believer firm in the midst of the process of growth. It is the insecure believer who is naturally unstable and flounders from one “experience” to another, never learning and therefore never arriving at the truth.

Meditate on these 12 points and behold the security that is freely given to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord. 

# Church Buildings

by Al Van Dyk (Mr. Van Dyk has written numerous Bible-based booklets and tracts. His literature list is available from *Servants' News* [order CALLIT] or directly from him: Christian Action League; P.O. Box 1035, Bella Vista, CA 98008.)

Thus says the Lord: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?" (Isa 66:1)

For the first fifteen hundred years of human history there is not the slightest indication of a building of any form in which to meet and worship God. Adam and Even communed with God in a relationship of innocence and holiness in the out of doors in the Garden of Eden. Enoch "walked with God" (Gen 5:24) without having a religious building to go to. Abraham, the great man of faith and father of all who live by faith, related to God in a wonderful and pure relationship, without a religious building. Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, lived a long and rich life of intimate relationship with God without a religious building in which to meet and worship God. These early patriarchs and pillars of faith along with hundreds of thousands of God's people for centuries never had any religious buildings. They lived in daily fellowship with God, relating to Him in the ordinary affairs and places of everyday life.

Then the children of Israel went to Egypt where they were slaves for hundreds of years. When they came out of the darkness of pagan Egypt, in their ignorance of not knowing how to relate to God in a personal way, God taught His people to relate to Him through the tabernacle. The tabernacle was a portable tent and a temporary means by which the people could be aware of the presence of God among them. Such a physical structure was only necessary because of Israel's ignorance of God due to their many years in paganism. Those were dark and pagan days. We need to go back to the ways before Egypt, when people related to God in purer and more personal relationships.

Both the tabernacle and the temple

were temporary structures for a limited time and purpose in the history and development of God's people. They served as places for animal sacrifice for sin until Christ the final and complete sacrifice came. Even when the temple stood in Jerusalem as a place for sacrifice and offerings to God, most of the people lived a great distance away and they related to God daily without relying on a building in which to worship.

The tabernacle and the temple were temporary physical structures representing the presence of God until the actual reality of God's presence came to dwell among us in Christ. God did not initiate the idea of building the temple. It came from David and Solomon and then God gave the detailed plans because this was what the people wanted (2Sam 7:1-7).

Now that Christ, the perfect, complete and final sacrifice for our sins, has come, we no longer need the tabernacle or the temple in which to offer sacrifices to God. God's Word, the Bible, says we the people of God, believers in Jesus Christ, are the temples of God where Christ dwells by the Holy Spirit in us (1Cor 3:16, 2Cor 6:16; 1Pet 2:5).

The idea of having religious buildings throughout the land for people to go to find and relate to God comes from pagan Babel and pagan Babylon.

## Babel

Notice the similarities between Babel in Genesis 11:2-9 and churches today.

The people settled in one place (Gen 11:2) instead of, "filling the earth" (Gen 1:28), and as the New Testament tells us to do, "Go into all the world and proclaim the Good News" (Mark 16:5). Christians are meeting together in the comfort of

church buildings instead of going out into the world to confront sinners with the good news of forgiveness.

"...come let us make brick..." (Gen 11:3).

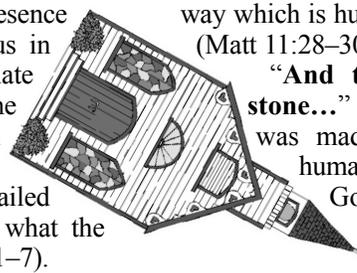
Here we see two things: 1) human resolve to do their own thing instead of resting in God and just doing what He tells us to do, which is usually easier and always better; 2) the people hunted in Genesis 10:9 and became the servants/slaves of Nimrod, making bricks for his city/kingdom (Gen 10:10). Today people are slaves of religious systems, working and paying for church buildings, etc. Many people are in bondage to man-made religion which is difficult versus Jesus' way which is humble, restful and easy (Matt 11:28-30).

"And they had brick for stone..." (Gen 11:3b). Babel was made out of man-made human products instead of God-made natural things; made out of the things of the earth instead of heavenly things.

Babel is the product of the kingdoms of men versus the kingdom of God. Physical church buildings versus the spiritual body of Christ creates an attitude of material, earthly and passing values instead of heavenly and eternal values. There's a mystery here. The mystery is that religious people who do not really know and follow God spiritually prefer to make physical man-made religious buildings instead of allowing God to dwell in them and live by His life within. We gravitate toward what we really are, mere temporary physical beings or eternal sons of God, the temporary kingdoms of men and this world or the eternal kingdom of God. The bodies of true Christians are the temples of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. (1Cor 6:19).

"Let us build a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Gen 11:4).

People still erroneously try to reach



God through physical towers, physical church buildings, sometimes with steeples reaching toward heaven like Babel.

God is not found in a religious place any more than He is found anywhere else. (John 4:21) Jesus said, "...**true worshippers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth.**" (John 4:23) The Spirit of God can and does reach people anywhere if hearts are open, honest and really ready to come to Jesus Christ for salvation.

While people build and attend church buildings to find God, the Bible tells us of a better way. The better way is: "**Christ in you, the hope of glory**" (Col 1:27). God inside of you, not in a physical building. The same wonderful truth is taught in John 15:5 and Galatians 2:20.

And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth" (Gen 11:4).

Notice that this is in direct disobedience to Genesis 1:28 and Mark 16:5. This is an example of trying to establish central control over all mankind through the use of a central, religious building. The building was to be famous—there would be "nothing else like it". But this is a man trusting in self instead of trusting and obeying God. Trusting in man brings a curse (Jer 17:5) but trusting in God brings a blessing (Prov 28:25).

"**And from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth**" (Gen 11:8). God cursed the Babel project by making different languages so the people could not understand each other. Their communication sounded like "babel" to each other. Just as God scattered the people abroad in Genesis 11 to fulfill His command (Gen 1:28) so He is using confused and imperfect churches to accomplish His great commission (Mark 16:15) today. However now in these last days God wants to do a higher and better work than ever before. God wants us to come to Him through the **Living Lord Jesus**, not a dead religious building.

### Babylon

Babel was the beginning of Babylon.

Babel and Babylon are the same words in Hebrew and they mean "confusion" (*Strong's Hebrew Dictionary* 894). Just as Babel and Babylon were places of confusion, so churches are confused today. Churches are in confusion because of different theological doctrines and thus they do not understand each other, and their confusion prevents people from understanding the truth of God. Theologians and seminary trained priests and ministers and their institutions and "churches" are usually a hindrance rather than an asset to the cause of Christ. The gospel is compromised by religious systems and religious buildings because they stand in the way of people finding Jesus in a personal, powerful and direct way. While it is true that many people come to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ through compromised religion, we should press in for the highest and best relationship and understanding that God has for us, a relationship direct and pure with Him, free from the influence of Babel/Babylon.

Babylon was known for her elaborate temples, a continuation of Babel's tower. The temples of Babylon were beautiful structures but without the truth of God. They were deceptive and false religious structures as are most "church" buildings today. Church buildings can look and feel "impressive", but are substitutes for a vibrant



For centuries, religious buildings have been expensive and impractical. High towers provide little usable space, but simply look "impressive"—reminiscent of Babel's "tower whose top is in the heavens" (Gen 11:4).

living relationship with Jesus Christ.

But it gets worse. Babylon became a satanic center for the occult, for demons and witchcraft. Many of the wicked teachings and practices of pagan Babylon were taken over by the Catholic Church and mixed with Christianity resulting in a deceptive and corrupt religion that claims to be "Christian". This ungodly mixture of paganism and truth has confused millions and persecuted true Christians throughout the centuries.

The book of Revelation contains more references to a later Babylon that seeks to be wealthy and control the nations in opposition to preaching the true gospel and worshipping the true God. Notice:

Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting **gospel to preach** to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship **Him who made heaven and earth**, the sea and springs of water." And another angel followed, saying, "**Babylon is fallen**, is fallen, that great city, because she has made **all nations** drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Rev 14:6-8).

The **woman** was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: **MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.** I saw the woman, **drunk with the blood of the saints** and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement (Rev 17:4-6).

A woman often symbolizes a church in the Bible, and this one is again interested in wealth and persecutes the true believers. Babylon will be destroyed when Jesus returns, on "**the day of God**" (2Pet 3:12). God's explicit instructions regarding Babylon are, "**Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues**" (Rev 18:4).

### High Places

The principle of Babel's religious

building to find God continued throughout Old Testament history with pagan people who built and worshipped their false gods in religious structures usually located on hills or other elevated places and therefore, the name, "high places". Israel borrowed the idea from its pagan neighbors and also had "high places". This is where Israel practiced a mixture of worship to the pagan god, Baal, and to the true God, Yahweh. The principle of "high places" continues today in this New Testament time in the form of "church" buildings where people go to try to find and experience God. Both true and false Christians meet together in religious buildings they erroneously call "churches".

The prophets of Israel condemned the high places (Jer 17:1-3; 32:35; Ezek 6:3; Amos 7:9). Isaiah's message concerning religious buildings is that God is not found in religious places erected by men (Isa 66:1). God wants us to come to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ, and Jesus calls us to personally follow Him, not a church organization or a church building (Matt 11:28-30).

### Synagogues

The practice of building synagogues in the cities of Israel after her Babylonian captivity was learned in pagan Babylon, and is continued today all over the world by Jews. God never told His people to build these man-made structures even though Jesus did sometimes reveal Himself in the synagogues. God is sometimes found in compromised situations that are not His highest and best for His people.

### The Roman Catholic Church

This church is a departure from the original teachings of Jesus Christ and a mixture of compromised Christianity and Babylonianism. This false religion began building churches about 300 years after Christ. These religious buildings incorrectly called "churches" were beautiful structures for the eye to behold but they were neither churches of God according to the Bible nor were they places where God abode (2Sam 7:5-6). Religious leaders tell people to attend the religious church buildings but God's Word, the Bible, says nothing of the kind. The Catholic Church

attracts people to their compromised version of Christianity by mixing the teachings of the Bible with whatever pagan background people come from. Thus it is no problem for Catholics to have Babylonian type religious buildings and to have Babylonian teachings and practices.

### Protestant Churches

Protestant Churches are products of the Reformation, and are a partial correction of Roman Catholicism. The Reformation only corrected some of the false teachings of Catholicism. While Protestant churches came to re-realize the wonderful truth of salvation by grace through faith, they still hang on to many of the traditions of Catholicism and ancient paganism.

One of the strongholds of Babel/Babylon/Catholic Church is the idolatrous practice of having religious buildings to supposedly meet God instead of relating to Him daily and moment by moment. Church organizations and buildings become religious control centers, a two class system where the "clergy" control the "laity". These words are not found in the Bible, but are part of Nicolaitanism (Rev 2:6).

### Church Buildings

The Bible pattern for church meeting places is in the ordinary homes of believers (Acts 20:20; Rom 16:5; Col 4:15; Phil 2). The early Christians related to God in natural everyday living situations, not religious buildings like the pagans. Special larger meetings involving several home churches can meet in rented halls or buildings (Acts 19:9). Avoid religious property which leads to church idolatry.

God wants you to relate to Him in a personal and vital relationship and with other believers in every day situations and homes of people. However, in the fourth century, Christianity became paganized under Rome and religious buildings became

a way and place to worship God, and this wrong practice is with us to this day. Millions of religious people still think in terms of worshipping God at "church" buildings like the heathen Babylonians did.

Beautiful church buildings create a false spiritual atmosphere, a man-made awe or reverence, created by architecture, stained glass windows, etc. It is a false religious spirit, not the Holy Spirit of God. It is a substitute spirit for the Spirit of our true and living God. God wants you to relate to Him daily and moment by moment in a natural and living way through Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ didn't have a preaching/teaching center and neither should we. Jesus never instructed anyone to build a church building and thus we have no basis for building them. Jesus rebuked Peter for wanting to build a religious structure. We should do as Jesus did and as he instructed us to do. We are told to go to people in the world to tell them the good news, not invite them to a church building (Mark 16:15).

### Meeting in a larger than home sized building is not wrong in itself.

Paul met in a rented hall in Ephesus where there were several home churches. It is having institutional type church meetings, whether large or small and either in a house or in another building that is wrong because they tend to take the place of a personal relationship with God and

with His people. It is sometimes good to have large Christian meetings where several home churches come together for a special teaching, celebration or other occasion.

### It's the idea of God in a building at a physical address that's wrong.

We must know Jesus, walk with Him, and talk with Him every-

where and all the time, and going to a church building short circuits that personal relationship. Steeples, stained-glass, ornate designs and other



The Apostle Paul once spoke to a group of women who gathered to worship at a river (Acts 16:13)—similar to a park of our day.

architectural elements that make people think "God is here" are all false and need to be discarded. If a larger congregation needs a place to meet, and their own building is the only practical option, it should be no fancier than the members' homes. God does not "live in the building"—it is a tool for the people.

Another problem with large church meetings is that some "gifted" brother will come along and try to take control—Nicolaitanism. Every home church must relate directly to the Lord (Master) Jesus. Don't let some religiously ambitious brother or sister control the church you attend. Go directly to Jesus. Christian apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are proper and important (Eph 4:11–12), but they should not control the people as in Nicolaitanism, clergy ruling the people (Rev 2:6).

The time is coming soon when institutional church buildings will either be controlled or destroyed by the end-time adversary of true Christianity. Now is the time to prepare by meeting together in homes.

Jesus said, "...I will build my church..." (Matt 16:18). Jesus is doing just as He said He would

do. Jesus Christ is building His pure and holy Church, His remnant people, who follow and obey Him, not the false prophets and false institutional church organizations and buildings of men. Don't be a Roman Catholic, Protestant, Baptist, Pentecostal, etc. (1Cor 1:12–13). Be a disciple of Jesus Christ; follow and obey the Lord (Master) Jesus not a religious leader or a church building.

Your body is the temple, dwelling place of Jesus by His Holy Spirit, not physical religious buildings of men (1Cor 6:19).

You are "in church" whenever and wherever two or more of you meet together in Jesus' name. It is just as Jesus said in the following verse. **"For where two or three are gathered in**

**My name, there am I in the midst of them"**. (Matt 18:20).

The word *church* is from the Greek "ekklesia—a calling out... assembly..." (*Strong's Greek Dictionary*). We are called out of the world to be a people of God, following Jesus Christ and bringing others to Him; being a light for God in a dark world. We are a living church consisting of God's called-out people, not an inanimate church building.

**The True Church**

Throughout all the errors and apostasy of church history beginning already in the first century God has had His pure and holy church, people not in the compromised religious institutions of men. It is one body, no divisions/denominations of men (1Cor 1:10–13).

Christ alone is the Head of His pure Church (Eph 5:23).

All who really trust, follow, and obey Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (Master) of their lives are part of the One Church which in the Bible is simply called "The Church" or "The Church of God". The Church of God has a government referred to in Eph 4:11–12 and functions through Godly men referred to in Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5 and other places.

God gives supernatural power and abilities called "gifts" to His people (Rom 12:6–8; 1Cor 12:4–12). All Christians are priests or ministers (1Pet 2:5, 9) and all the people may participate as the Holy Spirit leads them (1Cor 14:26). Meeting places are in the ordinary homes of believers (Acts 20:20; Rom 16:5; 1Cor 16:19; Col 4:15).

**Remember these facts always**

God lives in His people (1Cor 6:19), not in physical buildings. We Christians are the containers of God (2Cor 4:7). Christ is our lifeline (John 15:5), not "church" buildings. Christ—the life of God—is in you and you are in Him (John 14:20).

"But the hour is coming, and now is,

when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23–24).

I appeal to you, true worshippers of God—true Christians! Put away the religious buildings of man. Worship God in spirit and truth. Follow Jesus Christ. Live by His life within you. Don't accept a substitute. Live by the vital and dynamic **life** of Christ within you.

**Warning:** Babel/Babylon persecutes true Christians (Rev 17:4–5). Severe end-time persecution is coming against true Christians. Those whom the Devil cannot get by deception, he will try to get by persecution. Persecution will come from and through institutional churches.

**What You Should Do Now**

God's instructions are very clear:

"Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty" (2Cor 6:17–18).

"...Come out of her [Babylon], My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (Rev 18:4).

"Come to Me [Yahshua-Jesus], all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matt 11:28–30).

The way of man-made religion leads to death. **Leave it.**

Come to Jesus, not man-made religion and not a religious building. Trust in Jesus Christ to be saved (John 3:16). Follow Jesus for eternal life (John 10:29–30). Obey Jesus' commandments (John 14:15). Remember the commandments of God are still in effect (Matt 5:17–19). Follow and obey Jesus Christ as the Lord, which means Master of your life (Acts 16:31).

Tell others the good news of salvation (Mark 16:15).

Meet together with one or more other sincere and true followers of Jesus (Heb 10:25; Matt 18:20). 



# Baptism & Receiving the Holy Spirit: How Does it Work? Who Does it?

By Norman Edwards

When people seek to obey God, they can see the command in the Scriptures to repent of their sins and to be baptized in the name of Jesus (or in His Hebrew name, Yashuah). They can read the many biblical descriptions of sin, find that the result of sin is death, and see that eternal life is available in Christ. They can see the biblical examples of mature people—not infants—coming to be baptized; and they can see that baptisms are done where there is water to cover a person. Everyone should understand these points and there is much good material on them.

So when one is ready for baptism, to whom do they go to receive it? How does one receive the Holy Spirit? If one desires to belong to a church denomination, they will usually have a method that they must follow and people who are specifically designated to carry it out. In many groups if one does not follow their method, he or she cannot be considered a member of that church group. But there is no biblical example of being baptised into a Church organization. The Apostle Paul specifically taught believers not to align themselves with a particular servant of God (1Cor 1:12–15).

How then, can one be baptised into the body of Christ and receive the Holy Spirit? The Bible does not have a single section explaining what is “necessary for salvation” and if there are “optional extras” that can be added on if one wants to. It has a few commands that were given to different individuals at different times, and it has lots of accounts of how God actually worked with people like you and me. The purpose of believers is to accomplish as much as they can, not as little as they can (John 15:8; Matt 25:14–30).

## Read All of the Scriptures

Fortunately, it is possible to read all of

the Scriptures about baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit in a somewhat long article such as this. This is probably the best approach to understand God’s mind on the subject. Many baptism articles will start with scriptures that support the author’s position, go on to “explain” (sometimes rightly, sometimes wrongly) the scriptures that appear to differ from the author’s position and to sometimes ignore the scriptures that contradict it.

To make learning easier we have arranged the scriptures into the following categories:

- *Commands to Baptize*
- *Scriptures Explaining Baptism*
- *References to Old Testament “Baptisms”*
- *Baptism of the Holy Spirit*
- *Baptism for the Dead?*
- *Ten Baptism Stories*
- *Observations: Who Can Baptize and How*
- *Receiving the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*
- *Receiving the Holy Spirit in the New Testament (Before Acts 2, Acts 2 & Beyond, and via laying on of hands.)*
- *Laying on of Hands to Impart the Holy Spirit*
- *Laying on of Hands for Other Purposes*
- *Observations: Receiving the Holy Spirit*
- *What Happens If We Do It Wrong?*

Yes, this article is rather long, but after reading it, you should feel that you **know** what the Bible says about this very important subject. Scriptures about John the Baptist and his baptism **have been excluded** as his work and his baptism was clearly replaced by that of Jesus Christ (John 3:30; Acts 18:24–19:5). These verses are valuable in helping us understand how God uses human instruments to prepare people for what He intends to do, but they do not tell us much about baptism and

receiving the Holy Spirit today. The Holy Spirit was not given with John’s baptism.

## Commands To Baptize

Several scriptures command the Christian to be baptized and to baptize. Please read the full text provided here even though the verses may be familiar:

“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of [1] repentance from dead works and of [2] faith toward God, of [3] **the doctrine of baptisms**, [4] **of laying on of hands**, of [5] resurrection of the dead, and of [6] eternal judgment” (Heb 6:1–2).

Even though believers were being told to go beyond the “elementary principles of Christ”, 2,000 years later it is nice to have a list of those elementary principles. It is interesting to note that the first two things a believer must do himself, the next two things must be done in conjunction with other believers and the last two things God must do. Even so, there is no mention here of who in the church can or should baptize and lay on hands.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:19–20).

The Apostles were commanded to teach others everything that Christ taught them. That means they would also teach others to make disciples and baptize them. It appears to be a continual, self-replicating operation.

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. **He who believes and is baptized will be saved**; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out

demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover' (Mark 16:15-18).

Baptism is for the purpose of becoming a believer and doing a work empowered by Christ. These verses do not say that everyone will do every one of these things—elsewhere the Bible shows that spiritual gifts are distributed among believers (Rom 12:6; Eph 4:11-12). But these verses strongly imply that some miracles would follow true Christianity.

"Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call"... Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles" (Acts 2:38-39, 43).

Baptism is available to all people of all generations, "as many as the Lord our God will call". It is very important to understand that God does the calling, not a church group. Baptism or the laying on of hands should not be refused to someone who appears to be called of God, even if they have no connection with any religious group

### Scriptures Explaining Baptism

The following three scriptures show there is one baptism into the Body of Christ. There is no baptism into a particular church organization.

"For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by **one Spirit we were all baptized into one body**—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ have put on Christ**. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26-28).

"There is one body and one Spirit,

just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph 4:4-6).

Baptism is a symbol of our own death—that our own ways die as Christ died and that we now live to let him live His life in us.

"...**buried with Him in baptism**, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col 2:12-13).

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were **baptized into His death**? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so **we also should walk in newness of life**" (Rom 6:3-4).

Sometimes, the Bible just refers to "water" or "washing" to convey the idea of baptism. The analogy of personal cleansing of sin is still there:

"Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of **water and the Spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God'" (John 3:5).

"...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the **washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit**" (Titus 3:5).

### References to Old Testament "Baptisms"

Two Old Testament events are specifically listed as being a type of baptism—picturing a sort of death and resurrection:

"...when God waited patiently in the **days of Noah**, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. And **baptism, which this prefigured**, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1Pet 3:20-21).

"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed

through the sea, all **were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea**" (1 Corinthians 10:1-2).

The ceremonial washings required by the Old Testament Priests were also a kind of "baptism". The word used for the ceremonial washing of hands and dishes in Mark 7:4, 8 is the same one used below, and in Hebrews 6:2. Other Bible translations will say "washings" here instead of "baptism", but it is important to understand that the first century believers would see them as similar. The washing/baptism was a ceremonial cleansing—a removal of dirt/sin—that which defiles.

"This is a symbol of the present time, during which **gifts and sacrifices are offered** that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper, but **deal only with food and drink and various baptisms**, regulations for the body imposed until the time comes to set things right" (Heb 9:9-10, NRSV).

### Baptized with the Holy Spirit

There are six references to baptism "with the Holy Spirit". All are about the comparison of John's baptism with water—where the Holy Spirit was not given—to the baptism by Christ where the Holy Spirit was given. This baptism is something that Christ does—it is not something that one believer can arrange for another.

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire**" (Matt 3:11).

"I indeed baptized you with water, but **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit**" (Mark 1:8).

"John answered, saying to all, 'I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire**'" (Luke 3:16).

"I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is **He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit**'" (John 1:33).

"...for John truly baptized with water, but **you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit** not many days from now" (Acts 1:5).

"And as I [Peter] began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them [Cornelius and his household], as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, **but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.**' If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:15-17).

This last verse shows that this baptism of the Holy Spirit was experienced by the Apostles and by Cornelius and his household—the first Gentiles to receive the Holy Spirit. This was the fulfillment of the words spoken by Christ and by John. Whether or not this process was ever repeated with other believers is not clear from the Scripture. Since it is Christ who does it, he can do it as little or as often as He wants. There is no command for a believer to be "baptized in the spirit". However, the original disciples are examples to us of how Christ works—so we might expect Him to work similarly with others. There are several different expressions used in the scriptures that seem to indicate different amounts of the Holy Spirit: "filled with the spirit", "spirit upon me" "receive the spirit", etc. Since the word for baptism means "immerse", a person baptized with the Holy Spirit would be "immersed" in it.

### Baptism for the Dead?

One baptism verse that is sometimes greatly misunderstood is 1 Cor 15:29:

"Otherwise, what will they do who are **baptized for the dead**, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?"

Some Bible teachers have used this verse to encourage believers to get baptized on behalf of unbelieving dead relatives. They probably mean well, but repentance must precede baptism and it just isn't possible for living people to repent for dead relatives. To repent means to change, and dead people do not change. To understand this verse, read all of chapter 15. Some false teachers were preaching that there was no resurrection of the dead (v 12-13). They thought that believers would simply live on until Christ

returned. Paul had to remind them that in spite of the many miraculous healings, some believers had died (v 18). He goes on to explain the need for a resurrection in verses 35 to 58. In verse 29, Paul reminded them that if there is no resurrection ("otherwise"), then what good does it do to be baptized and then later die—become dead? The Greek is difficult here, but it certainly does not imply being baptized for "someone else" who is dead. *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* is fairly good here:

"Otherwise, what will they do who are being baptized **for the purpose of being dead ones?** If the dead are not to be raised up at all, why are they also being baptized for the purpose of *being such?*" (1Cor 15:29, NWT).

But in any translation, it should be clear here that issue here is whether or not the dead are raised—there is nothing at all in the Bible explaining what good could be accomplished by being baptised for a dead person.

### Ten Baptism Stories

All of the rest of the scriptures about baptism are case histories of people who were baptized—sometimes many, sometimes just one. We can learn a lot from what God thought was important enough to include in these 10 stories. It is also helpful to think about what was not included.

#### Baptism #1: Pentecost

"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about **three thousand souls** were added to them" (Acts 2:41).

This verse follows the famous Acts 2:38: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized... and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." It is important to see that this was done with one day's teaching. Those baptized were probably already knowledgeable of God from the Old Testament, and some may have heard the teaching of Jesus before. But they were from many different countries, so many were certainly hearing the teaching of Jesus for the very first time—but they were baptized that same day.

Who baptised these 3,000 people? If only the 12 Apostles did the baptizing and laying on of hands, each one would have had to baptize and lay

hands on 250 people. That would give them less than 2 minutes for each person working steady for eight hours. If all 120 disciples (Acts 1:15) participated in the baptism and laying on of hands, they could devote 15 minutes to each person and finish in 6¼ hours.

#### Baptism #2: Philip Baptizes, Peter and John Come to Impart the Holy Spirit and Confront Simon the Sorcerer

This is the longest story, but it contains many elements not in any other story, so it is well worth studying, in Acts 8:

"But there was a certain man called **Simon**, who previously practiced **sorcery** in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

But when they believed **Philip** as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, **both men and women were baptized**. Then **Simon** himself also believed; and when he **was baptized** he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent **Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them.** They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, **he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."** But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. **Repent therefore of this your wickedness**, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be for-

given you" (Acts 8:9–22).

This is the only Biblical instance where, after baptism in the name of Jesus, other brethren had to be called to impart the Holy Spirit. Some people will claim that an Apostle, or at least a "church leader of a certain rank" was necessary to impart the Holy Spirit. Yet the scripture does not say that.

This is also the only place where someone is baptised who was not really a believer. Simon the Sorcerer was baptized—he must have convinced Philip and the others that he had genuine interest. If the Holy spirit was given right away, many people would have accepted Simon's false miracles as works of the Holy Spirit—he would have deceived many. When Peter and John came, Simon showed his true colors. This may be the very reason why the Spirit was withheld, so that Simon could be "weeded out". But again, the scripture does not say that is the reason. We do not know for sure why Peter and John had to come to lay hands on the people. This does not occur in any of the other stories.

### Baptism #3: Philip Baptizes the Ethiopian Eunuch

"And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and **had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning.** And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet..."

Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?"... So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both **Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.** Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; **and he went on his way rejoicing.**

But Philip was found at Azotus. **And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea**" (Acts 8:27–28; 36, 38–40).

This scripture says nothing about receiving the Holy Spirit, but it is clear that the man from Ethiopia was headed back home and if he did not receive

the Spirit here, it is unlikely that he did elsewhere. (Peter and John had returned to Jerusalem—verse 25.) Afterward, Philip preached from Azotus to Caesarea—about 70 miles of coastline full of cities. This is truly the first "missionary journey" in the New Testament, though we have few details about it. There is nothing about whether Philip baptized or imparted the Holy Spirit on this journey, but it is difficult to imagine that he would only partly fulfill the commands in Matthew 28:19–20 and Mark 16:15–18.

### Baptism #4: Paul's baptism

"And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and **be filled with the Holy Spirit.**" Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and **was baptized**" (Acts 9:17–18).

Here, Ananias was specifically told to baptize Paul. Verse 12 said that Ananias laid hands on Paul to receive his sight. It does not say how Paul received the Holy Spirit. The account was retold by Paul in Acts 22. It is interesting that Ananias is not identified by "apostle", "evangelist" or any other title, but simply "a devout man according to the law".

"Then a certain Ananias, a **devout man according to the law,** having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him.

Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be **baptized,** and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord'" (Acts 22:12–16).

### Baptism #5: Cornelius and Family

This entire story spans most of Acts 10 and 11. The most significant verses are here:

"While Peter was still speaking these words, **the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.** And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. **For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.**

Then Peter answered, 'Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' And he **commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.** Then they asked him to stay a few days... Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but **you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit**'" (Acts 10:44–48; 11:16).

Important points to be learned here:

1. The Spirit came before baptism in this case.
2. It was the first time that Gentiles received it.
3. "Speaking with tongues and praising God" are given as the evidence of the **baptism** of the Holy Spirit.
4. Peter commanded that they be baptized—even though this was a ground-breaking event, he did not do the job himself.

### Baptism #6: Lydia Baptized

"One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshipper of God. **The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. And when she and her household were baptized,** she begged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.' So she persuaded us" (Acts 16:14–15).

Lydia was obviously a very competent woman. Even though she was newly baptized, the brethren met in her house (Acts 16:40). There are cautions against giving too much responsibility to a new convert (1Tim 3:6), but Lydia shows that a capable, newly-baptized person can do a lot.

### Baptism #7: Roman Jailer

God caused a great earthquake that loosed Paul and other prisoners in the

jail. The jailer was about to kill himself (he would have been severely punished for letting prisoners get away), but Paul told him that they were all still there.

"And he [the jailer] brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' So they said, '**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.**'"

Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately **he and all his family were baptized.**

Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, **having believed in God with all his household**" (Acts 16:30-34).

This story is probably the best Biblical evidence for baptizing someone even though they are just learning about God. Before Paul, the jailer did not appear to believe in God. But he had just witnessed a powerful, life-saving miracle, and he was probably very committed. This does show that there is no "minimum time" that a person must study or attend a congregation before they can be baptized.

### Baptism #8: Crispus & Others

"Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8).

This is a great example of the ruler of a synagogue—a man with great knowledge of the Old Testament—being baptized along with some Corinthians—most of whom knew little about the true God. But they would both worship together. Paul taught them all for a year and a half (v 11).

### Baptism #9: For With Only John's Baptism: Rebaptism and Laying on of Hands

"And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' So they said to him, '**We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.**' And he said to them, 'Into

what then were you baptized? So they said, 'Into **John's baptism.**'"

Then Paul said, 'John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied**" (Acts 19:1-6).

Even though these people believed in Jesus, God apparently did not put His spirit on them until they were baptized and had hands laid upon them. Many times the Church is described as the body of Christ, and the tasks of baptism and the laying on of hands seem to be a function that God wants the church to do. God could have just put the Holy Spirit in these people like he did to Cornelius and his family, but He left the job for His human instruments.

### Baptism #10: Crispus, Gaius and Household of Stephanas

"Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? **I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other.**

For **Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect**" (1 Corinthians 1:12-16).

Two very important points can be learned from this.

1. Who baptizes people is not important. Paul told them that it was not a consideration, and he personally did not baptize much at all.
2. Paul does not specifically remember who he baptized, nor does he refer to any kind of baptismal records. If such records existed, he could have used them to prove his point, but there is no biblical mention of the church keeping "baptism records".

### Observations: Who Can Baptize and How?

In all these instructions and examples about baptism, there is not one sentence that says anything like: "these **are** or **are not** the people who can baptize." We simply see the commands to do it, and see that people did it. Some were apostles, but many were not, and Paul was glad that he personally had not baptised many, even though he preached to thousands. Baptizing or laying on of hands is not in any of the Biblical lists of spiritual gifts (Rom 12:6-8; 1Cor 12:7-11, 28-31; Eph 4:11-15, 1Pet 4:8-11), rather it is in the list of basic doctrines (Heb 6:1-2) that **all** believers should have mastered. If God has set limits on who is allowed to baptize, He failed to state the rule or clearly illustrate it by examples.

Someone might ask, "if anyone can baptize, won't a lot of people be baptized falsely? Don't we need a trained ministry to do it right?" The answer is that God never expected believers to be able to perfectly discern who is really repentant and who is not. God determines that. Philip's group baptised Simon the sorcerer when he was not sincere. Seminary-trained ministers have baptized untold thousands of people who turned out to have no serious commitment to God. Even worse than this, ministers of church denominations frequently baptize people into their denomination. Even though they may not actually say this, their actions show it in that they insist on rebaptizing someone previously baptized in another denomination, and they tell members that they may lose the Holy Spirit if they leave their denomination.

A Bible student who does not represent a denomination will certainly know that baptism is into the Body of Christ, and that a believer must be guided by the Holy Spirit to find other believers with which to fellowship.

The Bible does not contain a specific "list of minimum requirements" for baptism, but by putting multiple scriptures together we can see that a person should: believe in God, repent, be willing to die to themselves and to live their life in Christ. There are several examples of people being ready to do this the same day that they are taught about these things.

The Bible never explains the role of the “baptizer”. Religious leaders frequently assure the person coming up out of the water that “on behalf of Jesus Christ, their sins are forgiven”. But the Bible gives them no such authority. Only God has the ability to determine if someone is really repentant. When an unrepentant “Simon the Sorcerer” is baptized, his sins are not forgiven. The person being baptized simply needs to be assured that God will do what he has promised, and if they have repented, then God will forgive their sin.

We can learn about how to baptize from scriptural clues and history. The Greek words for baptize imply a total immersion. Every scriptural instance that mentions where a person was baptized describes a place with a lot of water. There simply is no mention of pouring or sprinkling water.

Since the words used for Christian Baptism and Jewish ritual immersion are sometimes the same in the Bible, we can be relatively sure that the procedure was similar. The Jewish teaching of the times was that it needed to be done in “living water”—water that was flowing. Lacking a river or lake, the Jews frequently constructed a Mikveh—a large stone tub with at least a small source of water coming in and a place for it to flow out. Archeologists have discovered many of these that date back to the time of Christ. A bath tub with water flowing in and the drain partly open would be similar to this.

History further indicates that the person being baptized went under the water themselves—the baptizer watched to be sure that he or she went completely under water. If part of their body remained above water, the baptizer would tell them to redo it. (The baptizer might also assist a person who needed help getting in and out of the water.) Today, unfortunately, many “ministers” physically push the person under the water and then to pull them up. This seems to symbolize that a minister “controls a believer’s spiritual life”. Whereas, self-immersion symbolizes a person laying down their own life to Christ, rising up by the power of Christ in them and relying on other brethren to point out mistakes that they cannot see for themselves. This sym-

bolism seems much better.

### Receiving the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

The Scriptures use the terms “Holy Spirit”, “Spirit of God” and “Spirit of the Lord” (Yahweh) interchangeably. This author was amazed to find more specific references to people receiving the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament than there were in the New. However, the Old Testament references are usually to one person or a small group of people, whereas the New Testament references include many big groups. The Spirit does appear to work with people for a specific purpose at times without actually being in them. References are not included with words like “and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him...” (Jdg 13:25). Because of the large number, only a summary of most verses is presented—showing how and why the Holy Spirit came. Please look them up if you so desire, but as it stands, this is a quick summary of when God gave His Spirit as revealed in the Old Testament:

“See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship” (Ex 31:2–3).

Some of the Spirit was taken from Moses and given to 70 elders (Num 11:25)

“And Balaam raised his eyes, and saw Israel encamped according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came upon him” Num 24:2).

(Balaam also practiced divination—Num 22:7).

The Spirit came upon Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, so he could save the people (Jdg 3:9–10).

It came upon Gideon so he could organize an attack (Jdg 6:34).

It came upon Jephtha so he could organize an attack (Jdg 11:29).

The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson several times, mostly to fight people (Jdg 14:6, 19; 15:14).

Saul received it by coming close to some prophets (1Sam 10:6, 10).

Saul received it again by getting angry at evil Philistines (1Sam 11:2–6).

The Spirit of the Lord came upon

David when Samuel anointed him with oil to later be king (1Sam 16:13).

Saul received the Spirit again when he and his messengers came near Samuel and prophets (1Sam 19:20–24). (Saul took off his clothes and lay down naked because of the Spirit—God does not always do what we expect!)

Elisha received a double-portion of Elijah’s Holy Spirit from God when Elijah left (2Kngs 2:9–15).

The Spirit just came upon Azariah the son of Obed (2Chr 15:1).

The Spirit came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest when people refused to listen to other prophets (2Chr 24:19–20).

It came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah as he stood among the people and he prophesied a message of hope (2Chr 20:14).

The Spirit came upon Ezekiel when he prophesied (Ezk 11:5).

Joseph (Gen 41:38–39), Moses (Isa 63:11), Daniel (Dan 4:8) and others had the Holy Spirit, but it does not say exactly how they got it.

“And the LORD said to Moses: ‘Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him’” (Num 27:18).

“Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses” (Deut 34:9).

The last two verses represent the only clear example of laying on of hands to impart the spirit in the Old Testament. When the elders received some of Moses’ Spirit, or when Elisha succeeded Elijah, there is no record of laying on of hands. The rule there seems to be that God places His Spirit in people when He so decides.

### Receiving the Holy Spirit in the New Testament—Before Acts 2

Before the Feast of Pentecost, covered in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit was not generally available to all who would obey (Acts 5:32). Therefore, one might consider the receiving of the Holy Spirit in the first part of the New Testament as more similar in character to the Old Testament. Like the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit comes in a variety of situations by different means. Laying

on of hands does not appear to be one of them. Again, we summarize most of them, and leave out references duplicated among the four Gospels.

The Spirit descended “like a dove” on Jesus (Math 3:16).

John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth (Luke 1:15).

The Holy Spirit came upon Mary to conceive Jesus (Luke 1:35).

Elizabeth, John’s mother, was filled with the spirit when her baby leapt inside of her (Luke 1:41).

Zecharias, John’s father, was filled with the spirit after John was born (Luke 1:67).

The Holy Spirit led Simeon to see Jesus when He was still a baby (Luke 2:25–29).

The Apostles received some of the Holy Spirit when Jesus breathed upon them (John 20:22).

### Receiving the Holy Spirit in the New Testament—Acts 2 and Beyond, Without Laying on of Hands

While many churches teach that the Holy Spirit is only received through the laying on of hands, there are quite a few references, even after the Spirit was made generally available, where it was not mentioned or may not have happened.

The disciples—not just the twelve Apostles—were all filled with the Spirit accompanied by the sound of a mighty wind and tongues of fire on their heads (Acts 2:2–4). We do **not** have an account of the Apostles laying hands on the other disciples.

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; **and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call’” (Acts 2:38).

The laying on of hands is not mentioned above, nor is it in the general reference below. Galatians 3:5 is similar:

“Does God give you His Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?” (Gal 3:5).

Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit” to preach a powerful message (Acts 4:8).

The Holy Spirit again filled the disciples when they prayed (Acts 4:31). There were more disciples by this time than there were in Acts 2:2.

The Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his household while Peter was speaking (Acts 10:44; 11:15).

The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit after being persecuted (Acts 13:51–52).

It is unlikely that the disciples completely “lost the Spirit” then had to get it back again. But they were given an extra amount to accomplish the task at hand. Nevertheless, the laying on of hands was not mentioned in the above cases.

### Laying on of Hands to Impart the Holy Spirit

There are two clear references to believers receiving the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. Depending upon one’s viewpoint, they might be considered very common conditions, or they might be considered unusual conditions.

“For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:16–17).

This is the incident where Peter and John came to lay hands on the believers because they did not receive the Spirit after baptism. They also had to confront Simon the sorcerer who was baptized with the others (Acts 8:9–22).

“And he said to them, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ So they said, ‘Into **John’s baptism.**’ Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.’ When they heard this, they were **baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.** And when Paul had laid hands on them, the **Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied**” (Acts 19:3–5).

One could say that the above two instances of laying on of hands were to “correct errors”, and that the verses in the previous section, where the Holy Spirit simply came upon people, are the more common ways of doing it. On the other hand, one could say

that the previous section contains special miracles used to start a church, and that the laying on of hands was the more common way whereby the Holy Spirit was received later on. The Bible does not give the reasons why it happened differently at different times, so we do not know. But since God gives us all we need, we do not have to know now.

There is one more place where the Bible might say that hands were laid on to impart the Holy Spirit: the story of Ananias being sent to visit Paul. There are three different accounts of it, each giving varying amounts of detail. In the vision Ananias received, God tells him to put his hand on Paul so he will receive his sight back:

“And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and **putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight**” (Acts 9:12).

In the main story, which has the most detail, Ananias lays his hands on Paul, and then states his purpose:

“And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and **laying his hands on him** he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may **receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.**’ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. **He got up and was baptized**” (Acts 9:17–18).

Was the laying of the hands on Paul just for healing or also to impart the Holy Spirit? If so, then Paul received the Spirit **before** he was baptized, which is not the normal order, but did occur with Cornelius and his household. The retelling of this in Acts 22:12–16 records the healing and the baptism, but says nothing about the laying on of hands.

In the basic doctrines of Hebrews 6:1–2, laying on of hands is mentioned right after baptism, but nothing is said about the Holy Spirit. As the next section will show, the overwhelming number of references to the laying on of hands are for healing and leadership selection.

From these verses, we can certainly see that laying on of hands as **one way** that the Holy Spirit was imparted. There is certainly nothing wrong with believers doing it today. But to say that

it is the only way, or a required way seems in conflict with the scriptures.

### Laying on of Hands for Other Purposes

By far, the greatest use of “laying on of hands” or “touching with the hand” is for the purpose of healing. Jesus did it numerous times (8:3; 8:15; 9:18; 9:25; Mark 1:31, 41; 5:23,41; 6:5; 7:32; 8:23, 25; 9:27; Luke 4:40; 5:13; 8:54; 13:13). It was a practice of believers as well (Mark 16:18; Acts 5:12; 9:12, 17; 19:11; 28:8). Mark 16:18 says of believers in general “they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover”. Jesus also laid hands on children to bless them (Matt 19:13, 15; Mark 10:13, 16; Luke 18:15).

There are five other examples of laying on of hands other than imparting the Holy spirit. It is to separate people for a specific task within the church.

“[Seven men chosen by the brethren to serve the widows] whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them” (Acts 6:6).

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:2–3).

In the first passage, above, the brethren chose the seven, and in the second one, the Holy Spirit did. The laying on of hands appears to be a physical recognition and confirmation, along with a prayer, that acknowledges the people to be chosen for a specific task.

The next two examples show that hands were laid on Timothy when a prophecy was given that he would teach and lead the brethren—apparently even after the death of the Apostles (1Tim 1:18–19; 6:20–21; 2:Tim 2:2; 4:1–3). It makes little sense that these verses were referring to the Holy Spirit given to Timothy at baptism. Paul’s writing never mentions his baptism, but continually talks about his responsibilities to the church:

“Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the **gift** that is in you, which was **given to you by prophecy with**

the laying on of the hands of the eldership” (1Tim 4:13–14).

“Therefore I remind you to stir up **the gift of God** which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2Tim 1:6).

Finally, the last verse about laying on of hands is a caution to Timothy:

“Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure” (1Tim 5:22).

If it is fairly obvious that the reference here is to laying on of hands **for responsibility**. It makes little sense that Paul would be telling Timothy to be slow to lay hands on somebody for healing—or to wait to impart the Holy Spirit after baptism.

### Observations: Receiving the Holy Spirit

From this exhaustive study about receiving the Holy Spirit and the laying on of hands, it appears that we can conclude the following:

1. God often gives the Holy Spirit to whom He wants, when He wants. Sometimes it is for a short term and sometimes for life (or until it is rejected). Neither Simon the Sorcerer nor modern day church organizations have received an exclusive franchise to impart the Holy Spirit.
2. The Holy Spirit is sometimes imparted through the laying on of hands, but there are more examples where laying on of hands is **not** mentioned.
3. The most commonly mentioned use of laying on of hands in the Bible is healing.
4. The next most commonly mentioned use is for recognizing a position of service.
5. The Bible contains no limiting statements as to who can or cannot lay on hands. There is no example where anyone is told not to do it.
6. When people were baptized and did not receive the Holy Spirit, they did have the Apostles lay hands on them.
7. There are no Bible examples of light-hearted laying on of hands. Everyone was serious. No one should ever act on behalf of God if they do not have faith that they are

doing the right thing. “...for whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom 14:23).

The Bible shows that God has worked with people in many different ways. “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). Believers can trust the Holy Spirit to lead them, within the many methods described in the Scriptures. The overriding guidelines that the Bible gives us “are you within the law and will of God?”, not “are you authorized to do what you are doing?”

In the Old Testament, there were many functions that could only be done by the priests. But now, all believers are priests:

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1Pet 2:9).

Every believer is authorized to represent Christ!

### What Happens If We Do it Wrong?

There is a human tendency to say, “I can’t baptise or lay hands on people. What if I did it wrong?” There is a fine Biblical example of exactly that—a person who diligently taught what they knew, but did not understand as much as other believers. What happened?

“This man [Apollos] had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:25–26).

God sent people to correct Apollos, and he went on teaching. If he had refused the correction, that would have been a problem. God honors a diligent but humble attitude. If there is a man or woman who wants to be repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, any mature believer ought to be willing to serve them—not to act important, but to do what Christ said.

May God help all of us to better know and do His will. 

# Did RCG/WCG Say Only Their Baptisms Valid?

This letter by John Scott was in reference to a March/April 1999 *Servants' News*, page 22 letter from the Richard Nickels Family entitled *Did HWA Baptize into Organization?* Exception is taken to the Nickels' claim that the WCG baptised into "the Church of God", not their own organization.

Mr. Scott's letter, and others like it, eventually sparked the previous article on Baptism and the Holy Spirit. John Scott does extensive Biblical research, much of which he makes available on a CD. He may be contacted at: Bupp@btinternet.com

Both my parents, now deceased, were baptised by WCG ministers in the early 1960s. At the time, and prior to baptism, in line with the then normal practice in the UK (I cannot speak for the practice in other countries), they had to undertake a somewhat lengthy "investigation" by the ministry to see whether or not in the view of these ministers they were suitable for baptism (see comment on this below). During this exercise, they were asked to confirm that they believed that the then RCG [Radio Church of God] was the only true Church of God, specifically of the Philadelphian era, and the only one in which true baptism was available, and by which salvation could be secured.

This caused some difficulty for my mother, who had been baptised long previously in an evangelising mission. However, both so confirmed, and were baptised in due course. Despite this, both questioned privately whether these ministers had any authority or commission to conduct such investigations as a "condition precedent to baptism".

The readiness for baptism is not a subject for the judgment of the then RCG ministers, or, indeed, any screening process ordained by man. It is a matter of repentance on the part of the sinner, a desire for baptism and a better way conformed to God, the gracious conferring of the Holy Spirit, and subsequent growth in the Lord. There is nothing in this last sentence importing the decision, or vetting, or moderation, or judgment of man. What the RCG was doing was similar to the Roman Catholic Church catechitical modus, and that of many other churches, which insists on "interviewing, teaching, and counseling" aspirants before the church makes the decision on whether to grant baptism.

Now turning to the WCG, I can rec-

ollect an article in *The Good News*, in the earlier Tkach era, which stated (and I paraphrase), "entry into the kingdom of God is dependent upon having the imprimatur of God's Church".

"Imprimatur", in religious matters, is almost exclusively Roman Catholic. It means "sanction", allied to "authority". What Tkach, Sr. was saying was fundamentally the same as the RCG ministers had told my parents—the only route to salvation is through the "gate" of the RCG/WCG, and "we've got the key". This is what the Pope claims to hold: the "keys of heaven", known as "Peter's keys"; a doctrine dating from 431 A.D. [They are, in fact,

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**What the RCG was doing was similar to the Roman Catholic Church catechitical modus, and that of many other churches, which insists on "interviewing, teaching, and counseling" aspirants before the church makes the decision on whether to grant baptism**

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the keys of the pagan gods Janus and Cybele.]

This, in turn, is very closely related to the erroneous doctrine of "binding and loosing", whereby mortal man holds himself able to dictate to God what might be bound and loosed on earth and in heaven. Both the Roman Catholic Church and WCG, amongst many others, subscribe to this gross apostasy. RCG and WCG set themselves up as the moderator between man and God, but the Bible says we have only one advocate—Christ.

Now this letter comes to the personal part. I was baptised by other than the RCG/WCG "ordained" ministry. However, prior to being baptised, I met

with two ministers of WCG from Northern Ireland, and asked whether it was at all possible for anyone outside the WCG to have, in however small way, the Holy Spirit. I was told in no uncertain terms that such a thing was impossible. The comment that was made was that the only place where the Holy Spirit is evident is in the WCG: nowhere else. That was in 1972, at a private meeting in Dublin, Ireland.

Next, 1991, this time in Scotland. Again, two ministers, this time Messrs. Delap and Bolzern. Delap questioned the very validity of my baptism, on the basis that it had not been conducted by an ordained minister of the WCG, the only ministry "sanctioned" by God for such work. It was very easy to demonstrate biblical instances of people being granted the Holy Spirit without first being baptised by an ordained minister, but this made no impact. Delap also questioned my biblical understanding, my reliance on God, and much else besides. Bolzern, for his part, said little.

I happened to ask why healing of the sick was not in evident in the Church. Delap's answer was that "now is not a time of healing". According to him, God's healing was manifest in the early stages of the Church, and during Christ's ministry, and might be so again just before the end, but that that was speculation.

When pointed to John 14:12, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my father" [KJV], and when certain works of Christ were discussed, by way of illustration, the minister's response was that "now is not the time—Christ was only talking about the immediate few years after His departure."

However, when such a critical

*Continued on page 26*



We print a representative sampling of our mail—both positive and negative. We do not include names unless we are fairly sure that the writer would not object.

To avoid any difficulty, writers should specify how much of their name and address they would like us to print.

## Web Site Is a Blessing

**LETTER:** January 2, 2003  
Thank you and GOD'S blessings on your life as well and your family. I came across your web-site a week or so ago, but at the time I was rushed so I put it in my favorites! so I could check it out later. Praise the living GOD for the wisdom HE gives man-kind to have new technology. I thought your website to be incredible informative, sound teachings and one can delight oneself for long times in this web-site alone.

May our LORD JESUS continue to bless you to be a blessing.

Thank you for subscribing me and the issues you mentioned you'll send.

HIS Servant,

— Myriam

**RESPONSE:** Thank you for your encouragement. It is needed at times.

— NSE

## Many in the Splits Are Blind

**LETTER:** January 2, 2003  
Mr. Norman Edwards,

Thank you, thank you so very much for the *Eight Studies*. I thank God for your work.

I've been a member in several of the splits, Churches of God. Mercy! So many are blind to what is going on within the organizations of leaders—or they have gotten so comfortable (lazy) with their diligence in their studies and reproof and lost their focus.

I am sick and hurt for them. I just do home study, Sabbath and Holy Days at home now. This is not an easy thing for me to do, being alone and I so did enjoy the fellowship—meals together (potluck) being among people of the same mind.

— Texas

**RESPONSE:** I am glad that the literature has been helpful to you. Let me encourage you to frequently fellowship with other brethren, however you can work that out. If you occasionally attend with the Church of God split groups, you may

find others who think like you. Another approach is to visit Sunday congregations and look for people who are interested in keeping the Sabbath. There frequently are some, but they stay in their Sunday group because the only Sabbath-observing groups they know about are cult-like.

Continue to pray that God will show you how you can meet other brethren and how you can serve Him.

— NSE

## Likes Anti-Potter/Satanism; "Good Tidings Newsletter"?

**LETTER:** December 4, 2002  
Hello,

I hope this finds you well.

I really enjoyed the last *Servants' News* especially the equipping to answer those into Harry Potter and Satanism. Thanks.

Do you know who is putting out the "Good Tidings Newsletter"? It has a post mark from Minneapolis, MN. No return address or name. I would like to know.

It seems the person was once a member of the WCG and then PCG because they are very negative towards both in their writings. No one I know who knows my new address has confessed to giving out my new address. And I think it a rather cowardly thing to send literature without putting your name on it or a way to receive questions or rebuttals.

Thank you in advance.

— Rob Labeledz, Houston TX  
Rkcka@aol.com

**RESPONSE:** I don't know who is putting out the "Good Tidings Newsletter". I remember that I did not put my name on my first two mailings because I "did not think it mattered who was saying it as long as it was said". I also felt that very few people would listen to me if I was not "ordained". I hoped people might think that the papers were from somebody "important enough" that they would read them, but I was not interested in creating

a personality following as some previous Church of God leaders did. I have since repented from that lack of faith, and realize that if God is speaking through someone, that people will listen, even if he seems unimportant to himself.

People from the PCG probably have similar difficulties—with so much emphasis on hierarchy and position, they are afraid that nobody will listen to them if they know who they are. It is hard for these people to fit in with other independent Sabbatarians because they generally believe that the "one true Church" was the WCG for many years, but it became corrupt; then the PCG was the "true Church", but also became corrupt; and now it is just their local group—maybe just their family. It is very difficult for these people to believe that God is working through diverse groups with different teachings.

Hopefully, someone will see this letter in *Servants' News* and then respond to us or directly to you.

— NSE

## What Group Will Protect Me From the Tribulation?

**LETTER:** January 10, 2003  
Yeah, I can see [Gerald] Flurry [leader of the Philadelphia Church of God] as a Jim Jones thing [cult leader who led his 900 followers to Guyana where they allegedly all committed suicide] but... so people come to Christ and Repent—then what?

**RESPONSE:** Then they do what Christ said: they learn His way from the Scriptures, they are a "light to the world" by being honest and good to all whom they meet, they teach others the truths that they know. Whether these things be done on a one-on-one basis, a local-congregation basis, or as a national or international work is guided by the Holy Spirit and by prophesying (God showing things in dreams, visions, etc.—not by

adding up dates and years and interpreting symbols in the Bible).

**LETTER:** What's wrong with "place of safety"? I thought Germany was supposed to nuke America (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Revelation, bla bla bla...). I heard about that in 1975. Yes, it would be dangerous for Americans if Germany nuked America, I agree.

Do other HWA splinter-groups now not believe in a "place of safety" treatise? Interesting.

**RESPONSE:** The people who said that Germany would nuke America are the same people who said it would happen in 1972, then 1982, then "before the century is out". If they did not get the date right, are we still sure that they got the prophecy right? Please read the December 1998 issue of *Servants' News*, page 17, to see the many prophetic mistakes of Herbert Armstrong. I do not know how God can expect anyone to "heed the words" of a man who was incorrect in so much prophetic interpretation.

Some groups actively preach a "place of safety" as a drawing card to membership, others do not believe it at all, and still others are content to let some members believe it if they want to, but do not openly preach it.

**LETTER:** So who teaches the whole truth and nuthin' but the truth if it isn't Flurry? Tell me who can prove (or disprove) "all these things". I'd really like to know who I might follow wherever it is I'm supposed to follow them to, as Germany gets ready to nuke America.

**RESPONSE:** Christ taught us what to do, but it is amazing how many CoG groups teach something else. Notice:

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matt 24:36).

Even though Christ said He did not know it, people continue to try to calculate it from prophecies. Nowhere in here does Christ say to study prophecy so we would know when He comes.

"But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt 24:37-39).

Today, like in the time of Noah, people have always been "eating and drinking" and sinning, but did not know exactly how bad of a sin was necessary for God to take action. So we do not know today.

"Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left" (Matt 24:40-41).

This does not sound like one organization will be protected, but like individuals who have a relationship with God will be protected.

"Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Matt 24:42).

The Greek here does not mean "watch world events", but to watch oneself. "Be alert" is the translation in other Bibles. What kind of work is Christ doing in you?

"But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into" (Matt 24:43).

We need to watch our own house—our own body and life.

"Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matt 24:44).

Yet church groups continue to preach, "He is coming at the time that we have figured out—or the time that we will figure out".

"Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods" (Matt 24:45-47).

Here is the key: We are to be doing whatever work Christ has for us, feeding others, physically and spiritually. When He comes we need to be "so doing".

"But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt 24:48-51).

Gerald Flurry claims that all brethren outside his group are not Philadelphian believers. He has been found drunk by the police twice. Other CoG leaders and ministers are far more interested in the money coming into their organization (which determines how they eat and drink) and far more interested in proclaiming theirs to be the "Church God is using" than they are in just serving whomever Christ sends to them.

**LETTER:** Would it be someone in another splinter group who "loves" me enough to rescue me, with love of course, from the beer and the mob just in time so I can turn around and look up and witness the rapture—or catch some of Stoiber's [German leader] smuggled nuclear missiles?

— Jim Ray

**RESPONSE:** The purpose of Christianity is not to rescue individuals from the "wrath to come". Christ shows that we must follow Him and not seek to save our life. Some of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 were protected from trouble and some were not. I have about 50 scriptures that show protection for some who follow Christ, and trials and early death to others. But if the latter occurs, He gives the faith to endure and take the trials in confidence.

"And he who does not take his cross [stake] and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt 10:38-39).

The WCG and many of its splinters effectively preached a deal consisting of "tithes, attend services, attend Feasts and obey your minister and you will be delivered from the tribulation". It was sort of like a hefty insurance policy—a reasonable price to pay if the tribulation occurred in your life time, but it also resulted in the impoverishment of some who might have been able to serve God better if they had not so heavily sacrificed to support a "work" that was feeding itself and smiting its fellow-servants (believers in other groups).

I hope this helps. Let me encourage you to find other believers with whom you can fellowship. I do not think I can e-mail you a directory of believers who are independent from organizations as webtv does not support PDF. If you would like to give me a snail-mail address, I would be glad to send it to you.

May God strengthen you in your sincere and honest study.

— NSE

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## Covenant Study

**LETTER:** December 7, 2002  
Norman,

Thanks for including my request for covenant information [from your readers] in the July/August issue of the *Servants' News*.

I feel that I have really opened a “can-of-worms” when I began this study. It may really become an exhaustive study by the time that it is complete. The study has certainly generated a lot more questions than I had expected. **It is not always easy to separate currently held beliefs from what is clearly supported in Scripture.** Most covenant-related papers that I have read to date, are not intended to objectively examine the issues. Many address the covenants in such a way as to support an already established set of beliefs. A good example of this is the recently released UCG doctrinal paper on the covenants. If you do not have a copy of this paper, I could email you a copy; it is not available to all UCG members yet.

I have received several inputs from some of your readers as a result of the article in the *Servants' News*; these inputs should prove useful to maintain some unbiased on my part.

I will keep you informed as I proceed through the study.

Thanks, once again.

—Wilmer Wilke, 613-256-4690  
e-mail: wawilke@trytel.com  
1142 Corkery Road, Carp,  
Ontario, K0A 1L0, Canada

**RESPONSE:** Thank you for your study into this matter. I cannot promise to read the UCG paper now—I am behind in publishing the things that I have already studied. But if you are diligent and unbiased in your studies, I will certainly want to publish your results.

I completely agree with you in regard to your statement that most studies are done to bolster some existing doctrine. In general, people who are paid to study and who have the money to publish their studies belong to a large church group and they are expected to conclude that their group is teaching the biblical doctrine. Many simply could not grasp the idea that “their church” could be wrong in a major way—their view of salvation is too tied up with their being in the “right group” that teaches the “right doctrines”;

not on their relationship with Christ and His works through them personally.

The result of this is that most of the published studies of doctrines represent the views of larger church organizations. One of the reasons that “cults” often have truth is because they are **not** trying to prove an established doctrine, so they study the Bible with an open mind. Cults need doctrine that sets them apart from the other groups—biblical doctrines are easier to defend than false doctrines.

Even among independent believers, however, I have found a strong tendency for writers to produce a rather brief article putting forth an unusual doctrine, and then in the face of many contrary scriptures, the writers crank out hundreds of pages of difficult explanations staunchly supporting their original doctrine, rather than admitting that either the subject is not that clear, or that they were just wrong. I have even run into people who claim to write articles or hold conferences to open-mindedly find the truth on an issue—while inside they already know their conclusion and are just hoping to draw an audience that they can convince of their way.

I hope that you will do honest research showing many scriptures that people use to explain covenants and their differing opinions. If you believe that God has shown you the truth of the matter, I do not object that you state it at all, but I would hope that your truth has an explanation for most of the other scriptures that others use. (I read too many papers that ignore the scriptures that disagree with their conclusion.)

May God bless you in your study.

— NSE

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## Universal Reconciliation

**LETTER:** February 19, 2003  
Hello Norm,

Thank you for placing me on your list. I have read many of your articles over recent years, but I am intrigued that you should be lecturing at a college [Port Austin College] that believes in UR [Universal Reconciliation—all people will be saved someday]. Delighted, I guess, as this is a subject that I have been intensively studying these last three years.

I know according to what I have read from you that you would not see it as I do, but to me this is the real gospel. I'm glad that at last there is communication between some of

these groups and look forward to sharing some research with you.

I'll send you a paper on war shortly as soon as I have finished it.

Kind Regards,

— Graeme McChesney

**RESPONSE:** UR (Universal Restoration) is little different than what I believe. I believe that everyone who desires eternal life will be able to have it. Most UR groups believe that everyone will have it. The only difference is whether or not there will be a small group that rejects salvation. Both groups teach that we do not have to worry about people who have died or who will die not knowing about God. I realize that there are scriptures that talk about “all men being saved”, restoring “all things”, etc. However, I can point to places where the same word for “all” is used, and then elsewhere in the Bible shows that there are exception conditions—that “all” can mean “the vast majority”. Similarly, both of us realize that there are scriptures that talk about the “second death”, “ashes under our feet”, “totally destroyed”, “be no more”, etc. I am sure that you have explanations for all of these verses.

The main difficulty I find with many UR groups is that they tend to teach that “sin or righteousness in this life is no big deal because God is going to fix it all someday anyway”. I realize that not all do this. But most seem to underestimate the need to yield one's life to Christ and live by His power, and let Him do His works in us.

While the UR message is a blessing to people who may have once believed in the false doctrine of eternal hellfire, there is no urgency to teach that doctrine to everyone in that it states that everyone will be saved whether they know that doctrine or not. People who are atheists or who are happy with their religion may be changed little by UR. The message of eternal judgment (that there is salvation, but consequences for each thing we do in this life) and the message that “Christ died for our sins and will live in us and do His works in us now” is truly wonderful and in desperate need of spreading. That message eliminates a lot of needless suffering and replaces it either with good in this life, or being “persecuted for righteousness' sake” which is much better than needless suffering.

— NSE ☐

***“Beholding the Lord in Our Presence” from page 1***

message that I did “see” something new. He was explaining to the “Men of Judea, and all who live in Jerusalem” the meaning of what they had just witnessed regarding the power of the Holy Spirit. In verses 22 through 24, Peter was beginning to bring their focus of attention to Jesus.

As he continued in verse 25, Peter spoke of the patriarch David, saying:

“For David says of Him, ‘I was always beholding the Lord in my presence; for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted; moreover my flesh also will abide in hope; because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; Thou wilt make me full of gladness with Thy presence’” (Acts 2:25–28, NASB).

My eye kept coming back to the sentence, **“I was always beholding the Lord in My presence...”** This is a prophecy of Jesus Christ speaking of the special relationship with His Father. This was Jesus’ mind-set—“always beholding the presence of His Father with Him.” We must know from the Scriptures that there was a very intimate fellowship between Them, and this fellowship was the Source of all that Jesus did and said when He was the “Son of Man” on earth. For instance, Jesus tells us that He could do nothing on His own initiative but everything He did and said came from the Father, and “...I always do the things that are pleasing to Him” (John 5:19, 30; 8:28–29; 12:49; 14:10).

Now this understanding about the fellowship that must have existed between Jesus and His Father was not any specifically new revelation to me, although it did amplify what I already knew. However, over the next few weeks I was drawn back to these few scriptures, meditating and thinking on them. Then early one morning I was reading in Ephesians 5, where Paul admonishes the believers in Christ to be imitators of God, and the thought “be like Jesus” entered my mind, and

my thinking took off like a race horse.

My thinking went something like this: Jesus is the Son of God; I too am a son of God. Jesus had the Holy Spirit dwelling within Him; I too have this same Holy Spirit dwelling within me. Then, God the Father is my Father also, just as much as He is Jesus’ Father, the Father of all.

I thought, “How wonderful it would be if I could make this part of my life—always beholding the Lord in my presence—just like Jesus did when He was on earth. If I could do this, would it not draw me closer to Him? Wouldn’t this mind-set free up the Holy Spirit to accomplish God’s work in me more effectively (Phil 2:13)? Would this not make my daily walk with God easier and flow more smoothly?”



My answer to these questions was a resounding “Yes!” So then I thought I would do this and I determined to concentrate on “always beholding the Lord in my presence”. I began by posting a sticky-note above my desk quoting Acts 2:25, “I am always beholding the Lord in my presence; for He is at my right hand that I shall not be shaken.” I could then see this every time I sat at my desk, whether studying my Bible or some other type of work. Later on, the example of Daniel came to mind where he would take the time out of his busy schedule to pray with God three times every day. So I began to apply this. I already had the habit of praying early in the morning, but began to specifically ask God to grant me His grace to apply “...always beholding Him in my presence” three times each day.

I have understood from Genesis 1:26 that the original purpose of God was to “make man in Our image, according to Our likeness”. This same purpose was reiterated in Romans 8:29, but magnified “to the image of His Son”. He started out to complete His purpose with the first Adam, and is continuing with the second Adam. I have seen the overview of the process of salvation in 2Cor 3:18 where we are

now “being transformed into the same image from glory to glory”. The apostle Paul’s determined purpose for his converts was shared with us in Galatians 4:19, “My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you”.

That’s the key. It is not that we are to strive to be better people and thereby become like Jesus. Our responsibility as believers is to **yield ourselves to God**, just as Jesus did when He was the Son of man, and allow the Holy Spirit to transform us into the exact image as the beloved Son of God. As Christ is formed in us, we will then be “better people” because we will be like Him! The parable of the vine and the branches, given to us in John 15:1–11, seems to apply here. Verse 5 says, “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in Him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing [worthwhile before the Father]”.

In the “Sermon on the Mount” Christ made a very startling statement in Matthew 5:48, “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (RSV). Now this is not a suggestion, nor is it just a request, but it is a command from our Savior to all of us who profess belief in His name. This is indeed a difficult statement to grasp, and some have said that it is impossible to fulfill in this life; but it is impossible only if you leave God out of the picture (Matt 19:26; Luke 18:27).

With this in mind, permit me to paraphrase and personalize Acts 2:25–28; “As we believers in Jesus Christ always behold the Lord in our presence, and consider Him always at our right hand, then we will not be continually shaken or remain in turmoil of this world or of our Adamic nature. What peace and joy we shall have, and we can praise our God with a pure heart. Because we are sons of God, holy to the Lord, we can know that we are fully accepted in Christ, and that we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise until our resurrection. The Lord will continually reveal Himself to us and teach us His way of life so that we may glorify Him by yielding to His will and walking in His life. It is with His gladness that we can sing “Praise be to God” for making His presence personally available to us.” 

***“The Mechanics of the Law and Its Biblical Application” from page 1***

give a complete and accurate view of its many meanings. The indiscriminate use of this word “law” has not only caused schisms in many churches, but has also caused totally new and different religions to emerge with doctrines that are based on Statutes and Ordinances (or the lack of)—views which cannot be legally supported and have been misconstrued to be on the same level as “The Ten Commandments”.

The nature of the word “law” is so general and broad that it encompasses such a wide spectrum of activities, and rules of conduct that it behooves us all to have at least a basic understanding of its function, not only in our daily lives, but in our pursuit of a moral level of understanding and development. We have all been misled by individuals and groups, though well-meaning, but having a limited knowledge and understanding of the mechanics of the law.

**Statutes and Ordinances, although having the same weight as law, are not legally considered “the fundamental law”. This means that they are not at the same level, and have certain restrictions and limitations imposed on their implementation and duration that the fundamental law does not have.**

**Definition of “Law”**

“LAW. In its most general and comprehensive sense, law signifies a rule of action; and this term is applied indiscriminately to all kinds of action; whether animate or inanimate, rational or irrational. In its more confined sense, law denotes the rule, not of actions in general, but of human action or conduct.

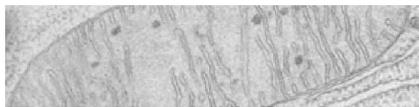
Law is generally divided into four principle classes, namely: natural law, the law of nations, public law, and private or civil law. When considered in relation to its origin, it is statute law or common law. When examined as to its different systems it is divided into civil law, common law, canon law. When applied to objects, it is civil, criminal, or penal. It is also divided into natural law and positive law. Into written law, *lex scripta*; and unwritten law, *lex non scripta*. Into law merchant, martial law,

municipal, and foreign law. When considered as to their duration, laws are immutable and arbitrary or positive; when as to their effect, they are prospective and retrospective” (Bouvier Law Dictionary, Revised Sixth Edition, 1856).

From *Strong’s Concordance*, entry number H8451, *torah*:

“law, direction, instruction

- a. instruction, direction (human or divine)
  - 1. body of prophetic teaching
  - 2. instruction in Messianic age
  - 3. body of priestly direction or instruction
  - 4. body of legal directives
- b. law
  - 1. law of the burnt offering
  - 2. of special law, codes of law
- c. custom, manner
- d. the Deuteronomic or Mosaic Law”



As you can see in the above definitions both *Bouvier* and *Strong’s* agree, in that the word “law” encompasses a wide spectrum of activities, and rules of conduct. The word “law” has always been used when speaking of any rule of conduct, including statutes and ordinances.

However it is important to understand that statutes and ordinances **differ** from the Commandments in three important ways:

- 1. They must be in harmony, and in compliance with the fundamental law (the Ten Commandments);
- 2. They are limited in the duration of their enforcement;
- 3. Ordinances can be readily changed or modified usually due to changing circumstances.

The Ten Commandments are considered the fundamental law as can be ascertained in the following definition:

**Definition of “Commandment”**

“The law (*torah*) was the title of the Pentateuch, constituting the 1st division of the canon (Luke 24:44); the legal portion, consisting of the Ten Commandments, which form **the fundamental law** of the theocracy, and statutes based on them, was given at Sinai” (*The New Westminster Bible Dictionary*).

In Exodus 20, not one of the commandments ends with a time period, as to the length of time it shall be in force. That is not the case when you consider the statutes.

**Definition of “Statute”**

“The written will of the legislature, solemnly expressed according to the forms prescribed in the constitution; an act of the legislature. This word is used in **contradistinction to the common law**. Statutes acquire their force from the time of their passage unless otherwise provided. Statutes are of several kinds: namely, public or private. Declaratory or remedial. **Temporary or perpetual**. 1. A temporary statute is one which is limited in its duration at the time of its enactment. It continues in force until the time of its limitation has expired, unless sooner repealed. A perpetual statute is one for the continuance of which there is no limited time, although it be not expressly declared to be so. If, however, a statute which did not itself contain any limitation, is to be governed by another which is temporary only, the former will also be temporary and dependent upon the existence of the latter” (*Bouvier Law Dictionary*, Revised Sixth Edition, 1856).

After the institution of the feasts of the passover season:

“And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it shall be a **statute for ever** throughout your generations in all your dwellings” (Lev 23:14, KJV).

**In other words, statutes, after enactment, have a limited period of duration although the duration may be perpetual. Notice that the statute (in Leviticus) has a time limit (for ever throughout your generations) whilst the commandments have no time limits imposed.**

**Definition of “Ordinance”**

“Strictly, a bill or law which might stand with the old law, and **did not alter any statute in force** at the time. A bill or law which might at any time be amended by the parliament, without any statute” (*Black’s Law Dictionary*, Third Edition).

As you can see in the above definition, the ordinance can not alter the

statute in any way, and can be amended at any time.

### Bible Example of Laws, Statutes and Ordinances

"And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof. **In one house shall it be eaten**; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof" (Ex 12:43-48, KJV).

#### In contrast, look at:

"**Thou mayest not sacrifice the passover within any of thy gates**, which the LORD thy God giveth thee: But at the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt" (Deut 16:5-6, KJV).

#### Also:

"And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: **this do in remembrance of me...** After the same

manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me" (1Cor 11:13, KJV).

The time limit on ordinances, depends on the duration of the Statute it supports however, **ordinances can, at any time be amended, based on the circumstances.** The "ordinance" of the Passover was changed in Exodus 12, and Deuteronomy 16, then again in the New Testament. That is to say, that the location and not the timing of the observance was changed due to the different circumstances. Notice that the statute dealing with the Passover, sets the time and duration of the observance of this feast.

"These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons. In the **fourteenth day of the first month at even** is the LORD's passover" (Lev 23:4-5, KJV).

However, the ordinance deals only with the **procedures** to implement the statute. In other words, the **start and end** of the feast is an integral part of the statute. (Also, note the addition of the new procedure, "foot washing").

"If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14-15, KJV).

With the information that we now possess as to the workings of the law, we can confidently conclude that:

a) The "Ten Commandments" are

the **fundamental and supreme** law which **will always be in effect.** (The commandments as the Messiah Himself "broke down" into two commandments, is the universal law of "Love" which is a spiritual law that had to be made physical for us humans to understand, seeing that we are only physical beings.)

b) All "Statutes" must be in harmony with the fundamental law and although having a **time limit**, are, in effect, until the beginning of the prophesied millennium mentioned in Revelation. (The "world" to come or the third "earth age" as some call it)

c) All "Ordinances" must be in harmony with the statutes and **can be changed at any time.**

The Law, that was "done away with," can only be referring to the "Ordinances" dealing with the sacrifices **which were added.** Also note that most of these ordinances were carried out by the Levitical priesthood who were removed.

"Wherefore then serveth the law? It was **added** because of transgressions, **till the seed should come** to whom the promise was made..." (Gal 3:19, KJV).

"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (Gal 3:24-25, KJV).

The "schoolmaster" was the law of sacrifices (actually ordinances that can be changed or amended due to changing circumstances) which job it was to point to the coming Christ, Yahshua.

"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward" (Psalm 19:7-11). 

## Passover Lamb Replaced by Christ, Not Bread & Wine

The difference between laws, statues and ordinances is well illustrated in the surrounding article. This writer would not have included the quote from 1Cor 1:13, above, because "passover" is never mentioned in that chapter. A better example of the ordinance change in the New Testament Passover is found in 1 Corinthians 5:7, KJV:

*"Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us."*

There is no longer a need to sacrifice a Passover lamb when one has been sacrificed for us. That is the change in the ordinance.

For more information on the Old and New Testament Passover observance, see *Servants' News* issues for Jan/Feb 1997 and Mar/April 1997, or our separate article *Resolving the Passover Controversy*. See page 2 for contact information or download them from [www.servantsnews.com/snprev.htm](http://www.servantsnews.com/snprev.htm) and [www.servantsnews.com/PDF/pascon01.pdf](http://www.servantsnews.com/PDF/pascon01.pdf).

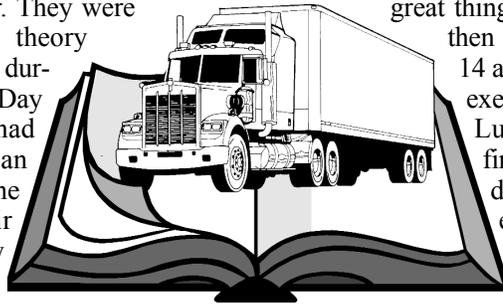
— Norman Edwards

**“Truckers Study” from page 2**

and a half years, but I would have guessed much longer given his level of understanding and the depths of his comments and questions.

I was struck today by how these men who are relative novices knew their way around the Bible. Quite often newbies need to be told what page we're on as opposed to chapter and verse, but these men kept right up with me. It's a pleasure to see that type of eagerness.

And they didn't seem at all put off by my comments that Jesus was not born in December. They were interested in the theory that He was born during the fall Holy Day season. They had never heard an explanation of the Holy Days, their meaning, and how they relate to Christ. The Feast days are a treasure trove of theology that always grab the interest of those who never heard the story.



**December 29, 2002**

We had five guests including two repeat customers. One of these men I did not recognize at first until something happened.

On rare occasions someone attends who is a real pain in the neck, and it's a challenge to keep some semblance of order to the meetings. Today was one of those days. One of the men is a rather husky fellow who had some strange ideas about a few things, most notably about himself. He had been overtaken by the “holyyghost” (one word) after fasting forty days and forty nights. He had healed lots of people, but hadn't raised anybody from the dead yet, but he knows preachers who have. (Afterward I wished I had thought a little quicker and asked him how those formerly dead people reacted after being in Heaven and then being told they had to go back into their corrupt bodies. But I'll save that question for the next time).

When his hands flew up in the air and he yelled, “Hallelujah”, I recognized him from another time. This was the same character who came by once

before and tried to dominate the meeting with the same sideshow techniques—all with himself at the center.

He believes that there are some people who are saved by grace and there are others, a very special group (in which I suppose he would include himself) who are righteous of their own accord and are saved in that way. Job was his example. Okay, I thought. Maybe we can get him to think about a few things. I asked everyone to turn to Job 31 and count the number of times that Job uses the first person pronoun in that chapter. My point was that Job was focussed on himself and all the

great things that he did. I then turned to Isaiah 14 and did the same exercise regarding Lucifer. Then finally, for a coup de grace, I had everyone turn to Luke 18 and the parable of the Pharisee

and the publican. The Pharisee exhibited the same attitude as Lucifer (I, Me, Myself, Mine, etc.). The Pharisee has an outward show of righteousness, but he trusted in himself and despised others. I was hoping that this guy would see himself in the Pharisee, a point that was not lost on some of the others in the room. But it went right over his head. I can still hear the echoes of what he said in that North Carolina accent of his. “But the Lord has shown me what that means. It says the publican went home justified. It doesn't say he went home sanctified. The Pharisee went home sanctified because he was doing the right things.”

So what do you do with that? You stop arguing and get on with the Bible study and make sure the fellow doesn't disrupt things any more.

The other repeat driver had just the opposite attitude—a humble spirit. After the study he asked me if I had heard anything from a lady who was there the same time he was who was struggling with issues of faith. He said that he had put her name on his computer to pop up every Sunday morning as a reminder to pray for her. He also has an issue of his own that demands prayer on our part. This is the second driver who I am aware of whose mili-

tary unit might get called up shortly. His unit would likely go to Korea. We need to hold those people up before God. They are devout people who have a strong sense of duty. God be with each and every one of them.

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*It is never easy to deal with the person who seems to have strong spiritual gifts from God (Bible knowledge, teaching, discernment, healing, wisdom, etc.) but also seems to be a know-it-all. In some ways, they may appear close to God. They may have the ability to teach and to help people toward God in a way that I could not. They may have studied complex areas of doctrine and come to the exact same conclusion that I believe God led me to see over many years.*

*Yet, they will insist that God has shown them things that I clearly see to be contrary to Scripture. If I try to show them, they will refute every scripture I bring up with an unlikely interpretation or even a “revelation” that they had had. They answer me so quickly it seems like they had already heard everything I said many times before. There is simply no way to get them to think about some of the teachings that I have understood from the Bible for years.*

*Sometimes, these people may have serious character flaws, so it is clear that one should avoid them. With others, it seems that God is working with them. But they would not work with me, unless I would just accept everything they teach. When I stand before Christ, I do not want to have to say that “I believe that this scripture means the opposite of what it says because someone claimed he had a revelation about it.” I think many of these people are Christians whom God is testing to see if they will seek Him with all their heart and resist self-righteousness. It is good to encourage them to be more understanding of what God does in other believers. I should be patient—I believed I was in the “one true Church” for 18 years. But some of these may be people with powerful religious demons whose mission is to sow discord among the brethren. They should be avoided!* 

**“Down-trodden Philadelphians”  
from page 3**

shall shut, and no one shall open” (Isa 22:22).

Christ compares himself to Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, a man that God raised up to have authority and be a “father” to Israel (Is 22:20–25, v 25 is a reference to His crucifixion). The name “Eliakim” means “God raises” or “God sets up”. The church in Philadelphia is being reminded that it is Christ who sets people up to do His will. This is the kind of encouragement that a small or scattered group would need.

“I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little **strength**, have kept My word, and have not denied My name” (Rev 3:8).

Christ reminds this group that He has given them things to do, even though they have little strength. The word translated “strength” here is from the Greek *dunamis* which means innate power—frequently miracle-working power. This word often describes the miracles of Jesus (Matt 11:20–23, etc.) and His apostles (Acts 2:22). Have you ever thought that a lack of miracles in your congregation is **one** sign of being “Philadelphian”? Indeed it may be the one criticism of this church. Indeed, the more isolated believer has a great struggle continuing to “keep His word” and to “not deny His name”. By contrast, a big church organization often watches its members and disciplines them if they begin to stray.

“Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you” (Rev 3:9).

Many Bible teachers identify the “Synagogue of Satan” as a specific group of evil Jews, Christians or politicians. But a single group in one time period does not seem likely as the “Synagogue of Satan” also affected the Church in Smyrna (Rev 2:9), and it affects many believers throughout history since all are commanded to listen to every message to every church.

A “synagogue” is an assembly of men for a religious purpose. “Of Satan” means that they are serving Satan’s purposes rather than God’s purposes. Someone who falsely claims to be a Jew is lying about his relationship with God, acting in Satan’s deceptive mode, pretending to be righteous (2Cor 11:14–15; Rev 12:9). (Satan can also operate in a fearsome mode, like as a roaring lion 1Pet 5:8.) If any group is pretending to be “God’s people” but are really serving Satan, are not they part of the Synagogue of Satan?

Why will God, in the future, have to bring the members of the Synagogue of Satan to the Philadelphian believers and make sure that they “know that I have loved them”? So those in Satan’s Synagogue will know that God was

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working with them. Which believers are the most **rejected** people? Before answering that question, let us distinguish between **persecuted** and **rejected** believers. Well-recognized church groups are more likely to be the target of **persecutions**—financial discrimination, mass imprisonment or even executions. Larger groups are **persecuted** by the “Synagogue of Satan” because they are recognized by them.

But diligent, God-fearing believers who are not part of any big organization are frequently **rejected** as “nuts”. For example, when someone asks for time off from their job or school to observe the Sabbath or Feast days, or asks to forgo vaccination or military service, they are usually asked “What’s your religion?” When one responds, “this is my personal understanding of the Bible”, they are often asked “What’s your religion?” again. Most people in worldly systems cannot imagine that anyone would risk losing their position at work or school unless some religious group required it. They would also expect the church organiza-

tion to get involved in defense of its members’ beliefs if necessary. “My group versus your group” is something that carnal people understand well.

Individual believers making major life-decisions by their own understanding of the Bible seems strange, today, and causes believers to be **rejected** by many potential friends, business associates, schools, governments and even churches. Many churches talk about “trusting in Christ” and “having a personal relationship with Him”, but in reality many professing Christians just do what their church organization expects. (There is nothing unbiblical about serving in local church congregations and international evangelistic ministries, but church groups should not undermine individual responsibility to do right: “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, **to him** it is sin”—Jms 4:17; see also John 9:41; 13:17; 15:22.)

In summary, Revelation 3:9 shows that the Synagogue of Satan—people who claim to be Godly but who are deceiving others—will someday recognize that God was with those down-trodden non-denominational believers who obeyed Him.

“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Rev 3:10).

Deliverance from trouble is offered to those who persevere. Indeed, one of the greatest difficulties among non-denominational believers is that they do not persevere and become lax—like the church in Ephesus that “left its first love” (Rev 2:4). Numerous scriptures indicate that not all believers will be spared great trials (Matt 5:11; John 15:20; 16:2, etc.), but they need not worry, Christ will help them as needed (Luke 21:14–15; Matt 10:27–29).

“Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (Rev 3:11)

Again, Christ reminds the church in Philadelphia **not to give up**. They need to continue to live by the power of Christ, use their spiritual gifts and do everything that they know is right. He

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**“Down-trodden Philadelphians”  
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does not talk about a “great commission” that He has given them to do.

“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of

heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name” (Rev 3:12).

The end of each of the letters to the seven churches contains a promise of a reward. The church at Philadelphia is not specifically promised salvation, rulership or valuables like some of the others. Rather they are promised that they will never have to leave God and that they will be identified with Him forever. This continues the theme of

hope for the **rejected** believer.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 3:13).

Each of the seven messages end by telling everyone to listen to all of the messages to the **churches** (plural). We should read and study them all and think how they apply to us. We will see that Christ promises rewards to individuals who repent and overcome. 

**“Did RCG/WCG Say Only Their Baptisms Valid?” from page 17**

onslaught is brought into one’s own house by invited guests, it does take one aback, if only for a short time. When they left, two of us, in independent locations, prayed to God seeking answers to the following questions.

These are reproduced below, with the text replies, received after asking that our hands be guided to whatever text God so wished:

Q: Is the WCG minister correct in his statements concerning the worthlessness and ineligibility of my baptism?

A: Isa 28:7–8, “But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and

the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean.”

Q: Should we fellowship with them?

A: Rom 16:17–18, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”

These answers left nothing in doubt.

When, later, these were put to a preaching elder of the WCG, he indicated that it was Satan who had guided our hands, and not the Lord. When it was pointed out that Satan would hardly have urged anyone to hold to the true doctrine, he had no answer.

So where does this leave the matter? Was the RCG/WCG as the Richard Nickels family have it? It may have been for them, but certainly not for me. From a reading of some of the vast amount of personal experiences of the WCG available on the Internet, I have concluded that almost all have had experiences much closer to my own.

And that is very, very, sad indeed.

Yours faithfully,

— John Scott, Scotland 

## Partial Literature List

All items are free upon request. All back issues of *Servants' News* are available as well as a complete **Literature List** and a **Literature Subject Index**.

Our goal is to bring worthwhile information to as many as want it at the lowest practical cost. The loose-leaf format used by *Servants' News* and most of the literature below is inexpensive and makes copying easy (most literature is public domain). You might wish to hold the pages together with a ring binder, staples, brads or a paper clip.

### Mature Literature

**Assembling on the Sabbath** by Norman Edwards, 16 pages. An exposition of the scriptures regarding our need to fellowship on the Sabbath and how to do it.

**Biblical Calendar Basics** by Norman Edwards, 26 pages. Explanation of Biblical and Hebrew calendars (beginning of months, years, postponements etc.)

**How Do We Give to the Eternal?** by Richard Tafoya & Norman Edwards, 36 pages. Biblical study of giving and tithing.

**How Does the Eternal Govern Through Humans?** by Norman S. Edwards, 34 pages. How the KJV translators altered

Scriptures about government to please King James and an analysis of what the Bible says about how we should govern in today’s congregations.

**What Does the Bible Say About Eternal Judgment?** by Norman Edwards, 83 pages. What happens to people after they die? What about “bad” people? “Good” people? Unbelievers? Diligent believers? Lax believers? Read the many scriptures that answer these questions.

### Study Resources and Information

**Freedom Biblical Information Center Catalog** by Wayne Schatzle, 12 pages. Free sources of literature and tapes.

**Giving and Sharing Order Form** by Richard Nickels, 3 pages. Has many excellent free items, low prices on hard-to-find religious books, and fine literature on floppy disk.

**The Journal: News of the Churches of God** edited by Dixon Cartwright. One free sample issue. Best single source of news about Sabbath-keeping groups. 24 pages.

**Servants' News Statement of Receipts and Expenses**, 2 pages.

**Servants' News Literature List**, 24 pages.

**Servants' News Literature Subject Index**, 51 pages. All articles & literature by subject.

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