

A Discussion of Some Religious Practices, 35 pgs

A Bad Start

For thousands of years Rabbinic scholars have been interpreting Torah (laws) and OT Scriptures, applying them to their contemporary situations. **Through accretion they developed a plethora of detailed traditions** to govern the activities of the Hebrew people ostensibly according to the OT and its laws, but in practice operated contrary to the purposes of God [eg. laws of Sabbath keeping, **Mt.12:1-14; Lk. 6:1-11; Mk.2: 27**. A Sabbath day's journey was the distance Jews could travel set by rabbinic tradition - about 0.6 miles in **Acts 1:12**].

By the time Jesus arrived, Judaism had been thoroughly corrupted. ^{apdx.1} There were many Jewish religious authorities [cf **Coming of the Kingdom, p.9-10**] and many different schools of thought ^{apdx.2} In other words, the unity of the OT Scriptures had been fragmented and **debased**. In much the same way, from the beginning of the Christian era [cf **Glossary, p.17**] and throughout its history, **NT doctrines have been disputed and differing traditions have been developing**. Because of man's propensity to sin, traditions have never been a reliable source for proper religious practices. Today there are lots of denominations with their own distinctives composed of many individual churches. ^{apdx.3} Further, there are a large number of **religious cults, sects, and strange practices** that are not Christian at all.

Christianity split into 3 main theological systems or frameworks: **Covenant Theology** as a fully systematized structure began to form during the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century and was formalized reaching its peak in the 17th. It is primarily embraced by the Reformed tradition, including Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Reformed Baptists; **Dispensationalism (DT)** began as a formalized theological system during the 1830s – 40s. It is popular in many Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches, especially within Baptist (like some Southern Baptists), nondenominational Bible churches, the Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Plymouth Brethren, etc. **Both these systems are hopelessly flawed** [**RPCD – Chapters; RPCD – Appendices; AFS Theological Notes; Children of Abraham – Children of God, charts**]. **Progressive Covenantalism** **tries to bridge the two incompatible systems**.

Happily there is **New Covenant Theology** [aka Promised/Fulfilled Theology] which correctly **focuses on the radical newness of the New Covenant age**. It emerged as a distinct system in the late 1970s [**Abraham's Four Seeds; cf New Covenant Church; New Covenant Theology & Baptist Distinctives**]. There seem to be only a hand-full of them around, which shows just how far sound scriptural understanding has been degraded. Some, like my church, do not identify themselves as New Covenant in church documents which is a practice that makes finding them extremely difficult.

It gets worse. With few exceptions at the time of Jesus, **people** tended to be **literalistic** [cf **p.22-23 below; Glossary, p.10**] in their thinking [leading to a **misunderstanding of figurative language** like metaphor, simile, or hyperbole]. ^{apdx.4} Many didn't seem to think in terms of **implications** [a function of classical logic, cf **Both-And, p.1**].

Starting Point

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKRmncbUMps> The Church's One Foundation

The Most Fundamental Question that everyone must decide is: What Authority to take as Governing One's Beliefs & Practices. **The Protestant Bible** (66 books - 39 OT and 27 NT) ^{apdx.5} without any other ancient writings, traditions, or admixture **is my choice**. This doesn't denigrate the historical significance or possible value of those other writings or traditions. It simply means that I don't regard them as **authoritative**. Just as the core of Christian doctrine is that Jesus Christ is the sole mediator between God and humanity, and the only way of salvation, so **the 66 books of the Bible** ^{apdx.6} **make up the complete, authoritative canon of divine revelation exclusively**. It is a **general principle** that adherence to more than one authority or standard just scrambles things up. **No servant can serve two masters [at the same time] ... Lk.16:13**. Even with a common authority, there will inevitably be conflict between differing opinions and perspectives. Witness the mess we have so far in our discussion. **This is why inherent uniformity between books of the canon and common understanding of their meaning by the church membership is so important.**

Paul writes, *I am astonished that you are so quickly [after your conversion] deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different gospel ... there are some [like Judiazers] who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we (or an angel from heaven) should preach a gospel contrary to the one we [already] preached to you^a ... which you received, let him be condemned to hell ... the gospel I preached is not of human origin. For I did not receive it or learn it from any human source; instead I received it by a revelation of Jesus Christ [Eph.3:2-6] ... I was savagely persecuting the church of God and trying to destroy it. I ... was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when the one who set me apart from birth ... was pleased to reveal his Son in me ... I did not go to ask advice from any human being ... but right away I departed to Arabia ... Gal.1:6-17.*

a. to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel [Rom.2:16] and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that had been kept secret for long ages, but now is disclosed, and through the prophetic scriptures has been made known to all the nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith [Rom.1:5] ... Rom.16:25-26.

Trouble Transitioning from the OT to the NT

From the very beginning of the Christian era **many Jewish people had trouble transitioning from the Old to the New Covenant thinking**. Inclusion of Gentile believers in God's promises to Abraham and his descendants was the major difficulty for them. **Mixing OT laws, teachings, and traditions with faith in Christ under the NC has been a problem for believers since Christianity's inception [see p.16-17 below]**. This has been further complicated by false traditions, teachings, religions, philosophies, practices, and demonic activity. Understanding the NC corrected much of this but some people were still bound in their consciences to OT ways.

In some of these cases such as **food** ^{apdx.7} and **special days**, Jewish Christians who were no longer tethered to the law [whose consciences were free from obligation to observe such requirements] **were to accommodate the weak**, who believed they were still obligated, so as to not cause them

to violate their conscience. In other cases such as circumcision, the NT relates a more complex story in the early days of Christianity's spread. **Gal.5:1-6 & Acts 15:1-19** give us **the correct understanding** - **neither [physical] circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any spiritual significance [anymore].**^{apdx.8} The **correct and controlling** understanding of a passage refers to its spiritual significance as pictured by **figurative language or a symbolic act**.

Spiritualist Sebastian Franck (1499-1543) bringing a charge against both the church fathers and their descendants [Catholics and Reformers] wrote: **They mix the NT with the Old, as also today their descendants do. And when they have nothing with which to defend their purposes, they run at once to the empty quiver [OT] and from it prove [the legitimacy of] war, oath, government, power of magistracy, tithes, priesthood; and praise everything ascribing this all forcibly to Christ without his will, cf New Covenant Church, p.3-6.**

type & antitype

In Scripture there is a progression toward a goal or fulfillment of God's redemptive plan. It is a movement from shadow or type to spiritual reality (antitype) [Gods Training #2, p.2-3; Understanding the Book of Rev, p.8].

The Holy Spirit is making clear that the way into the [actual] Holy Place had not yet appeared as long as the old tabernacle [lit. first tent, as a type of the OT system of approaching God] was standing. **This was a symbol** for that time, when gifts and sacrifices were offered that could not perfect the conscience of the worshiper. They served only for matters of food and drink and various ritual washings; **they are external regulations imposed until the new order [Gk. time of setting things right] came to be** ... So it was necessary for the **sketches** [prototypes, outlines] of the things in heaven to be purified with these sacrifices, but **the heavenly things themselves required better sacrifices** than these. For Christ did not enter an [earthly] sanctuary—the representation [prefiguration, type] of the true sanctuary—but into heaven itself, and he [alone] appears now in God's presence for us, **Heb. 9:8-24; RPCD, apdx.p.8-9.**

Human Traditions vs the Word of God

All the presentations and remarks on my website are intended for **people (leaders, teachers, students) who honestly desire to get it right and are not afraid to examine what they have been taught or come to believe**. The chief priests, experts in the law, & elders questioned Jesus, **By what authority are you doing [teaching] these things, and who gave you this authority? Mt.12:23; Mk.11:27-28; Lk.20:1-2.** This essay compares some church doctrines & traditions with the New Covenant. It asks one basic question, **What is your authority for believing, teaching, and doing what you do?** Lets begin with some stern warnings.

Criticisms of Jewish Leaders ... & of anyone else the shoe fits

Parables, Mt.21:28-46, portray the chief priests, elders, & Pharisees as disobedient sons, unworthy to enter the kingdom of God, & corrupt, murderous vineyard tenants; etc.

The New Testament contains numerous passages **condemning Jewish religious leaders: Woe [Judgment is coming] to you [self-righteous] scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, because you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven** by obscuring their understanding of the true nature of God and

salvation through your legalism, useless traditions, and false teaching ... **Mt.23:13; Lk.11:52.**

... you too suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they in fact did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and persecuted us severely. They are displeasing to God and are opposed to all people, because they hinder us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved, **1 Thes.2:14-16.**

Core Conflict: Jewish leaders focused on strict pietistic adherence to oral laws and external purity, while Jesus emphasized the internal spirit of revelation [in the beginning (divorce) was not intended, **Mt.19:8**]. **Tradition vs. Commandment:** Jesus confronted the Pharisees and scribes for creating a loophole allowing them to **override** (nullify) **God's command** to honor parents. They were using the **tradition of the elders to avoid their duty to help needy parents** by claiming to have diverted (redirected) those resources to God [the **Corban rule** – when property or money was dedicated to the temple treasury, it became sacred and unusable for anything else].

*Hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied correctly about you when he said, This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me, and they worship me in vain, **teaching as doctrines the commandments of men [Isa.29:13]** ... They are blind guides ... who lead others who are blind so both will fall into a pit [Jesus characterized Jewish religious leaders as **blind guides who lead their followers astray** so both fall into a ditch, **symbolizing the spiritual ruin and disaster as a consequence of false teachings and misused authority**] ... **Mt.15:1-9.** And you do many things like this, **Mk.7:5-13.***

HERE IS THE FIRST CHALLENGE: Are you **sure** your position or status in the church is authorized under the NT? Is your understanding informed by Scripture or does it emerge from your tradition or the **theological framework** you have espoused? If so, it is not Christianity.

Problems with Judiazers, false brothers, Gal.2:4

Saul (aka Paul, **Acts 13:9**) was converted around 34–36 AD, a few years after Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus sent his disciple, Ananias, to lay hands on him, restore his sight, and baptize him. Saul was consequently filled with the Holy Spirit, **Acts 9:1-18.** This dramatic event, marked his transformation from a persecutor of Christians to **Christianity's most influential apostle.**

*in the church at Antioch there were prophets ... the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me **Barnabas and Saul** for the work to which I have called them. Then, they placed their hands on them [a ceremonial act of agreement picturing the commissioning by God and the church for the task at hand] and sent them off [Paul's first missionary journey (46-48 AD) did not result from a church planning session but was the Spirit's initiative, **Acts 13:1-14:28**]. So **Barnabas and Saul were sent out by the Holy Spirit ... Acts 13:1-4.***

*Paul and his companions arrived at Pisidian Antioch and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue, **v.13-14**, where Paul relayed the history of Israel through the resurrection of Jesus ... **and by this one everyone who believes is justified from everything which the law of Moses could not justify you, v.16-39** ... On the next Sabbath almost the whole city assembled together to hear the word of the Lord. But **when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy***

[their motivation had nothing to do with a conviction], and they began to contradict what Paul was saying by reviling him [verbally attacking him personally], v.44-45.

The same thing happened in Iconium when Paul and Barnabas went into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a large group of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against [worked them up by lying about] the brothers ... the population of the city was divided ... When they arrived back at Antioch ... they reported ... that God had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles ... 14:1-4, 27.

fourteen years [after his conversion], Paul went up to Jerusalem again with Barnabas, taking Titus along. I went there because of a revelation and presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles ... Yet not even Titus ... was compelled to be circumcised, although he was a Greek [to do so would have been seen as an admission that circumcision was important for salvation]. Now this matter arose because of the false brothers with false pretenses [Judiazers who held that Gentile converts to Christianity had to be circumcised and obey the law of Moses as well] who slipped in unnoticed to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, to enslave us [again to the law]. But we did not surrender to them even for a moment,^b in order that the truth of the gospel would remain with you, Gal.2:1-5.

But you, brothers and sisters, are [supernatural] children of the promise like Isaac. But just as at that time the one born by natural descent [Ishmael] persecuted the one born according to the Spirit [Isaac], so it is now. But what does the scripture say? Throw out the slave woman [Hagar] and her son, for the son of the slave woman will not share the inheritance with the son of the free ... For freedom Christ has [liberated us from the yoke of the law]. Stand firm, then, and do not be subject again to [entangled in] the yoke of slavery [burden by the rigorous demands of the law as a means of gaining God's favor] ... If you let yourselves be circumcised [for the reason of being made acceptable to God], Christ will be of no benefit to you at all ... For in Christ Jesus neither [physical] circumcision nor uncircumcision carries any weight [definitive word]—the only thing that matters is faith working [expressing itself] through love [1 Thes.1:3], Gal.4:28-5:6.

b. When Paul decided to take Timothy, a Christian in his teens, on his second missionary journey (49-52 AD), Acts 15:39-18:22, he circumcised him, 16:3, to facilitate his work among the Jews, not as a condition for salvation.

The Greatest in the Kingdom

... on the way the disciples had argued with one another about who was the greatest ... Jesus said to the twelve, If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all, servant of all. He had a little child stand among them ... he said to them, Whoever welcomes one of these little children [referring to recent converts] in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me ... welcomes the one who sent me, Mk.9:34-37; Lk.9:46-48; Mt.18:1-5. Mt.18:3 adds unless you turn around and become like little children [Jesus rebuked the disciples' pursuit of status, and emphasizes trust & humility], you will never enter the kingdom of heaven! This touches on THE Most Important Consideration for any human being ... rejoice that your names stand written in heaven, Lk.10:18-20; Heb.12:22-

24; Rom.8:28-39; Rev.21:27; Summary of Christianity, p.2; Coming of the Kingdom, p.10. Jesus couples it with a sobering reality, *Stumbling blocks are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!* **Lk.17:1; Mt.18:7.** He then describes the terrible consequence for those who cause young Christians to stumble, **Lk.17:1-3; Mt.18:6-9; Mk.9:42-48.** *Take heed to yourselves, Lk.17:3.*

*A dispute started among the disciples over which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. So Jesus said to them, **The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them**, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. Not so with you; instead **the one who is greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the one who serves.** For who is greater, the one who is seated at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is seated at the table? **But [au contraire] I am among you as one who serves, Lk.22:24-27; Mk.10:42-45; Mt.20:25-28; GT. apdx, p.15-16.***

At the Passover meal, **Jesus got up ... and began to wash the disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel ...** when finished, he asked, *Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord' correctly so ... If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, **you too ought to wash one another's feet.** For **I have given you an example** [This is not intended to be a religious ritual in the church. It is to be our mentality in every day interactions with each other.] — you should do just as I have done for you [parabolic language] ... the slave is not greater than his master, nor is the one who is sent as a messenger greater than the one who sent him, **Jn.13:4-5, 12-16.***

If one's **motives** are corrupt, so is everything he does! **Tit.1:15.** *The experts in the law [scribes] and the Pharisees ... [pietistically] **do all their deeds to be seen by people** ... [by making religious symbols excessively prominent to display their outward piety with conspicuous religious symbols, rather than genuine internal devotion to God's commandments, showing their hypocrisy and **focus on human praise over divine purpose.** Jesus highlighted the intention behind their religious acts revealing their hearts to be far from God.] They love the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues and elaborate greetings in the marketplaces, and to have people call them Rabbi. But **you are not to be called Rabbi, for you have one Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brothers** ... The greatest among you will be your servant. And **whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted ... Mt.23:2-36; Mk.12:38-40; Lk.20:45-47.***

ANOTHER CHALLENGE: Are you honest enough to forsake your status/practice if you cannot prove that it is authorized by scripture?

False Philosophers

*Be careful not to allow anyone to captivate you through an **empty, deceitful philosophy** that is according to human traditions and the basic forces of the world,^c and not according to Christ ... Christ has destroyed what was against us, a certificate of indebtedness expressed in decrees opposed to us [Mosaic law with all its regulations] ... Disarming the [spiritual] rulers and authorities, he has made a public disgrace of them, triumphing over them by the cross ... Let no one who **delights in false [pietistic] humility** and the worship of angels [a type of extra-biblical spiritualism] pass judg-*

ment on you. That person goes on at great lengths about what he has supposedly seen, but **he is puffed up with empty notions by his fleshly mind [ego]**. He has not held fast to the head from whom the whole body ... grows with a growth that is from God ... If you have died with Christ to the basic forces of the world,^c **why do you submit to them as though you lived in the world?** Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch! These are all destined to perish with use, founded as they are on **human commands and teachings**. Even though **they have the appearance of wisdom ... in reality they result in fleshly indulgence**, **Col.2:8-23**.

watch out for those who create dissensions and obstacles contrary to the teaching that you learned. Avoid them! For these are the kind who ... serve their own appetites. By their smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of the naive, **Rom.16:17-18**.

there are many rebellious people [against the word of God, Paul, & Titus as the Lord's ministers], idle talkers, and deceivers, **especially those with Jewish connections** ... they mislead whole families by teaching **[motivated by desire]** for dishonest gain what ought not to be taught ... For this reason rebuke them sharply that they may ... not pay attention to **Jewish myths and commands of people who reject the truth**. All is pure to those who are pure. But to those who are corrupt and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both **their minds and consciences are corrupted**. They profess to know God but with their deeds they deny him, since **they are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good deed**, **Tit.1:10-16; Mk.7:1-13**.

Paul: after I am gone **fierce wolves will come in among you**, not sparing the flock. Even **from among your own group men will arise, teaching perversions of the truth** to draw the disciples away after them, **Acts 20:29-30; Mt.7:15**.

The Holy Spirit warns that some will turn away from the true faith; they will follow **deceptive spirits and teachings that come from demons**, forbidding marriage and certain foods, **1 Tim.4:1-3**.

false prophets arose among the people **[of old]**, just as **there will be false teachers among you who will infiltrate your midst with destructive heresies** ... And many will follow their debauched lifestyles. Because of them the way of truth will be slandered. And in their greed they will exploit you with deceptive words, **2 Pt.2:1-3**.

... **in the last days difficult times will come**. For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, savage, opposed to what is good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, loving pleasure rather than loving God. **They will maintain the outward appearance of religion but will have repudiated its power**. **2 Tim.3:1-5**

c. false, worldly, elementary religious teachings that salvation required combining faith in Christ with "secret knowledge" and man-made regulations concerning physical external practices such as circumcision, ^{apdx.8} eating & drinking, ^{apdx.7} and observance of religious festivals, **Gal.4:3, 9**.

ANOTHER CHALLENGE: Consider the direction Scripture is moving. **Is what you have been doing wrong-headed or against the trend or thrust of the relevant passages?** Look at this.

Pentecostal, Charismatic, & Assembly of God Churches

With regard to spiritual gifts [working definition: manifestations of the Holy Spirit enabling believers to minister to the needs of Christ's body] ... **there are different gifts**, but the same Spirit. And **there are different ministries**, but the same Lord. And **there are different results**, but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. **The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the benefit of all** [1 Cor.14:4, the fundamental consideration; Rom.15:2; 2 Cor.10:8; Eph.4:12, 29; 1 Thes.5:11] ... [representative list omitted, cf. Rom.12:6-8]. It is one and the same Spirit who produces all these things, distributing to each person as he decides, 1 Cor.12:1-11.

Now each of you is a member of Christ's body. And God has placed in the church [gifted people] first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then [powers] miracles, gifts of healing, helps, gifts of leadership, different kinds of tongues ... But you should **be eager for the greater gifts**. And now I **will show you a way** [that doesn't depend upon gifts] **that is beyond comparison, v.27-31**.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaiUT74Vshk&list=RDEaiUT74Vshk&start_radio=1

O The Deep, Deep Love of Jesus

... Love never ends. But if there are prophecies, they will be set aside ... tongues will cease ... knowledge, will be set aside ... when what is perfect comes, the partial will be set aside [like] **childish ways**. For ... then ... we will know fully, just as we have been fully known. And now these three [ways] remain [in contrast to the gifts] : faith, hope, and love [1 Thes.1:3] . But the greatest of these is love, 13:1-13.

Pursue love and be eager for the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy ... the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement, and consolation ... he builds up the church [1 Cor.12:7] ... **The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues**, unless [someone] interprets so that the church may be strengthened. Now, brothers and sisters ... how will I help you unless I speak to you with a revelation or with knowledge or prophecy or teaching ... Since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, seek to abound in [gifts that] strengthen the church [v.4], 14:1-12.

After they prayed ... they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and **spoke the word of God** [basic meaning and use of the gift of prophesy in the NT] boldly, Acts 4:23-31.

... I will pray with my spirit and ... sing praises with my spirit ... [as well as] with my mind ... **in the church I want to speak five words with my mind to instruct others, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue** ... stop becoming like children in your thinking. Instead become infants [13:11] in evil, but become mature in your thinking ... Prophecy is ... for believers ... So then [Paul's summary] **be eager to prophesy, but do not forbid anyone from speaking in tongues**. And do everything in a decent and orderly manner, 1 Cor.14:13-40.

I've paired down these 3 chapters as much as possible **to reveal the thrust of the subject** from the scriptures. You do see that speaking in tongues is minimized throughout, right? Whatever direction your teachings or practices have taken needs to be identified and all of us need to be evaluated by the scriptures.

Plain Talk

From the beginning of Christianity's inception there has been a plan unfolding. The miraculous signs were intended to kick-start this new era. The signs were a bridge of continuity between Jesus' life and the institution of the spiritual nation of his people. They largely petered out as the age of the apostles drew to a close. Although this has been the trend, it would be a mistake to think that the Spirit never performs miracles or gives gifts today. For instance a growing number of Muslims report embracing the gospel after experiencing dreams or visions of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless the Spirit's work is apparent, though less spectacular, from **1 Cor.12, now I will show you a way [that doesn't depend upon gifts] that is beyond comparison, v.31 ... Love never ends. But if there are prophecies, they will be set aside ... tongues will cease ... knowledge, will be set aside ... when what is perfect comes, the partial will be set aside [like] childish ways ... now these three [ways] remain: faith, hope, and love [in contrast to the gifts] ... 13:8-13.** This is mature Christianity, cf **Summary of Christianity, p.5.** [I recommend a short on-line booklet **The Mark of the Christian**, 1970, 38 pages. Free revised copy at [y+Francis+Schaeffer.pdf](#)]

There are practices, such as private prayer in tongues, that don't conform to this thrust. There are a number of people who were raised in or introduced into tongue-speaking situations who have since concluded that their experiences weren't real. There is definitely a psychological pressure to fit-in or exhibit spirituality in this manor. In such situations tongues are inevitably elevated to be of major importance contrary to **1 Cor.12-14. As we have seen, true spirituality is something else entirely.**

Religious Practices

Historically many disciplines (often in the form of some physical self-denial or deprivation, self-inflicted pain, punishment, or suffering) have been employed ostensibly to draw nearer to God: abstinence; chastity; fasting; solitude; silence; simplicity; poverty; frugality; etc. People tended to look upon these **works of the flesh** as if they were godliness when they weren't even disciplines toward godliness! [cf **Means of Grace, p.1**]. The Roman Catholic Church has an especially abysmal history of abuse by leadership in concocting all kinds of anti-scriptural religious fictions which are nothing but works of the flesh – **false hope** based on lists of blessings to acquire and things to do or suffer. **Jesus died for us because neither our suffering nor our works have any merit before God.** They have created their own vocabulary to describe them: indulgences, penance, absolution, purgatory, prayers for the dead, last rites, etc. The Catholic Church hierarchy has faced centuries of criticism for egregious sins involving corruption, systemic abuse, and political maneuvering. ^{apdx.9}

The fruit of the flesh generated through discipline and effort can **mimic** the fruit of the Spirit [**GT #6, p.7**]. Moralism: good character development can **approximate** walking in the Spirit by giving us a **semblance of true spirituality**. But **for us to actually be alive to God supernaturally, it must be energized by FAITH in Christ, Heb.11:6.**

... the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For ... no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received ... the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things that are freely given to us by God. And we speak about these things ... with words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people ... The one who is spiritual dis-

cerns all things ... For ... we have the mind of Christ, **1 Cor.2:10-16**.

Why aren't foot-washing [p.5] or fasting [p.9] commanded in the NT as integral to spiritual discipline? What about veneration of icons & relics,^d elaborate liturgies, chanting, incense, rich traditions, ostentatious vesture & headdresses [p.5], the ancient practices, and traditions of a bygone era [cf **Scripture & Conscience**, p.2]? All the things some traditions bring across the divide into the new era of the church are at best no more than faded images from the defunct OT period. There is no command **not** to do most of these, but they simply don't belong [cf **New Covenant Church**, p.1].

d. Veneration: Believers honor relics to honor a "holy person" and connect with God, often believing erroneously that "the Virgin Mary" and other saints **intercede for the faithful**.

A Reborn People

... the LORD declares, **I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah**. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors ... **This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time, I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts**. I will be their God, and they will be my people ... **they will all know me** ... For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more, **Jer.31:31-34** [The NC would succeed the OC].

... I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land ... **I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols** [signifying spiritual purification and renewal]. **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you** [representing a profound inner cleansing by God foreshadowing blessings of the New Covenant]; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And **I will put my Spirit in you** ^{apdx.10} and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws [a complete transformation]. Then ... you will be my people, and I will be your God, **Ez.36:24-28**.

... **the new covenant** of which Jesus is mediator is superior to the old one, since **the new covenant is established on better promises** ... But God found fault with the people [**Jer.31:31-34**] and said ... **By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete**; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear, **Heb.8:6-13**.

The Dawning of the New Day

the region beyond the Jordan, and Galilee of the nations. **The people walking in darkness see a bright light; light shines on those who live in a land of deep darkness**. You have enlarged the nation; you give them great joy ... For **a child has been born to us** ... He shoulders responsibility and is called Wonderful Adviser, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His dominion will be vast, and he will bring immeasurable prosperity, **Isa.9:1-3, 6-7**.

Now there were shepherds nearby ... guarding their flock at night. **An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them**, and they were absolutely terrified. But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid! ... for I proclaim to you good news that brings great joy to all the people: **Today your Savior is born in the city of David. He is Christ the Lord** ... Suddenly a vast,

heavenly army appeared ... praising God ... **Lk.2:8-14**.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJw-ey1DPRA> O Holy Night, Josh Groban

the Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We saw his glory—the glory of the unique one, full of grace and truth, who came from the Father ... we have all received from his fullness one gracious gift after another. For the law was given through Moses, but **grace and truth came about through Jesus Christ.** No one has ever seen God. The unique one, himself God, who is in closest fellowship with the Father, has made God known, **Jn.1:14-18**.

I am the light of the world! The one who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life, **Jn.8:12**. **I have come as a light into the world**, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in darkness, **Jn.12:46** ... the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining [**the overlap between the former and present ages**], **1 Jn.2:8**.

For **we did not follow cleverly concocted fables when we made known to you the power and return of our Lord Jesus Christ**; no, we were eyewitnesses of his grandeur [**at the mount of transfiguration**]. For he received honor and glory from God the Father ... This is my dear Son, in whom I am delighted [Listen to him.] ... we ourselves heard it ... [**Mt.17:1-8; Mk.9:2-8; Lk.9:28-36**]. Moreover, **we possess the prophetic word [Acts 3:18-26] as an altogether reliable thing** ... **pay attention to this as you would to a light shining in a murky place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts** [**daybreak signifies an inner dawning of spiritual understanding, faith, and the presence of the living Christ, moving from scriptural knowledge to experiential reality**], **2 Pt.1:16-19**.

The New Era

In a little while you will not see me; again after a little while, you will see me ... **you will be sad** [**Jesus referring to his crucifixion**], but your sadness will turn into joy [**at his subsequent resurrection**] ... you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and **your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you** [**because Jesus will always be with us, Mt.28:20, Jn.16:19-22**].

The Pharisees and scribes said to Jesus, John's disciples and those of the Pharisees frequently fast [**fasting accompanies mourning**] and pray, but yours continue to eat and drink. So Jesus said to them, You cannot make the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them [**this calls for celebration, the occasion dictates the mood**]. But those days are coming, and when the bridegroom is taken from them, at that time they will fast. **He also told them a parable**: No one tears a patch from a new garment [**representing the New Covenant**] and sews it on an old garment [**the Old Covenant**]. If he does, he will have torn the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins ... [**the new covenant is incompatible with the old**].^e Instead new wine must be poured into new wineskins. **No one after drinking old wine wants the new**, for he says, The old is good enough, **Lk.5:33-38; Mt.9:14-17; Mk.2:18-22**.

e. This is not to say that the OT has nothing worthwhile besides Jewish history that supplies a con-

text for the law and the prophets. On the contrary, knowing God involves seeking him and his wisdom through his words and actions. It means learning about his ways and thoughts, **Isa.55:8-11**. Knowledge of the Lord is dispersed throughout all the Scriptures, in creation, and in life ... *every expert in the [OT] law who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven [NT fulfillment] is like the owner of a house who brings out of his treasure of knowledge what is new and old [the new interprets the old, cf **Our Rosetta Stone**], **Mt.13:52; New Covenant Theology, p.4-5**.*

Keys of the kingdom

Jesus asked his disciples ... *who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered, **You are the Christ, the Son of the living God**. And Jesus replied, You are blessed, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you [was not the source of your understanding], but my Father in heaven [was]! ... you are Peter, and **on this rock** [Peter's confession—that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God] **I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven** [anticipating Peter's addressing the crowd at Pentecost, leading many to believe, **Acts 2:14-41**]. **Whatever you bind on earth** , [by judging in the name of Jesus Christ, **Acts 5:1-11; Gal.2.11-14** ^{apdx.11}] **will have been bound** [perfect passive participle] in heaven, and whatever you release on earth [by witnessing & healing in his name, **3:1-4:37**] **will have been released** [ppp] in heaven, **Mt.16:15-19; 18:18; Mk.8:27-29; Lk.9:18-20**.*

*After Jesus had risen, the disciples had gathered together and locked the doors of the place because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Jesus came in and stood among them said to his disciples ... **Just as the Father has sent me, I also send you. Then he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit** [a **gesture** anticipating their reception of the Holy Spirit in 50 days at Pentecost] . **Who's sins you forgive will have been forgiven** [perfect passive indicative] ; **Who's sins you retain will have been retained** [ppi] , **Jn.20:21-23**.*

The keys to the kingdom symbolize the authority to forgive or not to forgive the sins of people, given to Peter by Jesus, which represents the power to open the way into the kingdom of heaven through proclaiming the gospel and teaching its truths. **This authority extends to all believers who make the same confession as Peter**. In the context of the church, **Binding and loosing** refers to proclaiming the terms of salvation in Christ, essentially unlocking the way into the kingdom for those who believe and pronouncing judgment on those who reject it. The Greek perfect passive verbs *will have been* _____ show that **Christians' exercise of this authority would disclose God's election rather than precede or cause it**.

The Authority of the Holy Spirit & the Power of the Gospel

The authority of the Holy Spirit is God's divine power and presence, operating through the Word of God to convict, and empower for ministry. The Spirit is the essential link for the Word to become a living, active reality. **This authority isn't separate from Christ or Scripture but works through them, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth, **Acts 1:8, 1:4-5; Lk.24:47-49****.

when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, he saved us ... on the basis of his mercy, **through the washing of the new birth and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us in full measure through Jesus Christ our Savior. Tit.3:4-6; Jn.1:12-13.**

The following examples refer to promises or statements in their immediate context followed by the general principle involved.

... I am eager also to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome. For **I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes** ... For the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith, just as it is written, The righteous by faith will live, **Rom. 1:11-17.**

For **the message about the cross** is ... **the power of God to us who are being saved** ... God was pleased to save those who believe by the foolishness [as the world sees it] of preaching ... **we preach about a crucified Christ** ... to those who are called ... Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, **1 Cor.1:18-24.**

Preview of the Coming Empowerment at Pentecost

Jesus sent out his **twelve apostles** with specific instructions to **preach the Kingdom of God, heal the sick, and cast out demons**, telling them to travel light (no extra food, money, or clothes), rely on local hosts, and **proclaim that the kingdom of heaven has come near**, focusing initially on Israel, signifying a new era and gathering, as documented in **Mt.10; Mk.6:7-13; Lk.9:1-6, 10.**

The number **twelve** symbolizes the twelve tribes of Israel, marking this as a significant gathering of God's chosen people. This ... **Commissioning of the Twelve**, **established the apostles as Jesus' primary representatives for announcing the new kingdom**. This event served as an early training and empowerment exercise, showing the disciples how to operate in the authority of God's kingdom and demonstrating the kingdom's arrival through their ministry.

In **Lk.10:1-20**, Jesus commissioned **72 other disciples**, sending them out **in pairs** to prepare every town He planned to visit for His arrival by proclaiming the Kingdom of God, healing the sick, and relying on God, not worldly provisions, **empowering ordinary Christians for ministry**.

The disciples returned with joy, reporting **even demons submitted to them** in Jesus' name, **v.17**. *So he said to them, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Look, **I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions and on the full force of the enemy, and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you [parabolic statement], but rejoice that your names stand written in heaven, **Lk.10:18-20.***** This event marked a significant expansion of Jesus' outreach beyond the twelve apostles, involving ordinary disciples. Unlike the initial mission of the twelve (focused on Israel), this mission to the seventy/seventy-two had no geographical or ethnic restrictions, **pointing to a universal mission to and for all people**.

The Pouring Out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, 30 AD

About **120 disciples**, including the Apostles, after Jesus' resurrection were gathered in prayer,

awaiting the promised Holy Spirit before Jesus' ascension. This small group became the nucleus of the early church, growing to 3,000 at Pentecost and expanding rapidly. Peter's short argument at this time resulted in Matthias' being chosen by lot to replace Judas as the 12th apostle [This is the only time Matthias is mentioned & the last mention of casting lots in the Bible], Acts 1:15-26.^{apdx.12} when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like a violent wind blowing came from heaven ... And tongues spreading out like a fire appeared and came to rest on each one of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven residing in Jerusalem ... each one heard them speaking in his own language. Completely baffled, they said, Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that each one of us hears them in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and the province of Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own languages about the great deeds God has done ... saying to one another, What does this mean? Acts:2:1-12.

The Holy Spirit & the Power of the Gospel

... there are some standing here who will not experience death before they see the kingdom of God come with power, Mk.9:1.

The apostles used authority from God to open the way for people from three groups to enter the Kingdom: Jesus said to the [11] apostles, wait in Jerusalem for what my Father promised ... you [all, plural] will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now ... you [plural] will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, then you will [all] be my witnesses (1) in Jerusalem, and (2) in all Judea & Samaria, and (3) to the farthest parts of the earth [Gentiles], Acts 1:4-5, 8.

(1) **Mixed Crowd of Jews and Jewish Converts:** Shortly after Jesus' ascension, Peter's rise to prominence among the apostles was showcased on Pentecost where he acted as their spokesman for the apostles delivering a great Gospel presentation at the coming of the Holy Spirit. He encouraged a crowd of Jewish believers to accept Jesus as the one selected by God to rule in the Kingdom of heaven. Peter showed them what they must do to be saved thus opening the way for them to enter the Kingdom, and thousands accepted his word, 2:14-41. His rise continued in the days that followed by performance of miracles (3:1-10), Speeches to crowds (11-26), proclaiming the Gospel before Jewish rulers, elders, and teachers of the law, 4:3-21, and pronouncing judgment on sinners, 5:1-11. So began the ministry of healing sicknesses and those tormented by evil spirits, 12-16, deliverance from jail, 18-20, and teaching, 21, 42.

(2) **Samaritans:**^f On the day Stephen was stoned to death [Acts 7:54-60], a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were forced to scatter throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, Acts 8:1, 3-4.

Now those ... scattered went around proclaiming the good news of the word. Philip went down to the main city of Samaria and began proclaiming the Christ to them. The crowds were paying atten-

tion with one mind to what Philip said, as they heard and saw the miraculous signs he was performing. For unclean spirits ... were coming out of many who were possessed, and many paralyzed and lame people were healed [God was revealing to the Samaritans that the way into the kingdom was now open to them]. So there was great joy in that city, **4-8**.

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God [were obedient to the gospel proclaimed by Phillip], they sent **Peter and John** to them. These two went down and prayed for them so that they [too] would receive the Holy Spirit. (For **the Spirit had not yet come upon any of them**, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then **Peter and John placed their hands on the Samaritans** [a gesture of conveyance], **and they received the Holy Spirit, 14-17** [The conversion of the Samaritans opened the way for them to enter the Kingdom and foreshadowed the conversion of the Gentiles] ... So after Peter and John had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, proclaiming the good news to many Samaritan villages as they went, v.25.⁹

f. Samaritans were a mixed-blood race resulting from the intermarriage Israelites (left behind when the people of the northern kingdom were exiled) and Gentiles brought into the land by the Assyrians, **2 Ki.17:24**, resulted in a pagan syncretism. The Samaritan Bible consisted of only the Pentateuch. They worshiped the true God, but knew little of him, **Jn.4:22**. Hostility existed between the Jews and Samaritans in Jesus' day, **Jn.4:7-9**.

g. Acts 8 describes **two special cases of conversion (1) a practitioner of sorcery, v.9-13**, which was forbidden, **Dt.18:10-12**; **(2) a eunuch, v.26-39**, excluded from full participation in Israel's religious community and specifically banned from the Temple, **Dt.23:1**. **Both professed faith in Christ and were baptized showing the all-embracing nature of the gospel**. But the sorcerer lusted after the power to bestow the Holy Spirit and was rebuked by Peter - *your heart is not right before God! Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that he may perhaps forgive you for the intent of your heart. For I see that you are bitterly envious and in bondage to sin, v.21-23.*

(3) Gentiles. Three and a half years after Jesus' death, God revealed to Peter that Gentiles [non-Jews, ie. the rest of the world] would also have the opportunity to enter the Kingdom. In response, Peter preached to Gentiles, thus opening the door for them to receive the enter the Kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ.

After God had given Peter a vision 3 times and explained it, **Acts 10:9-16**, he went to a Roman centurion's house. *Peter started speaking: I now truly understand that **God does not show favoritism in dealing with people** ... God anointed Jesus from Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him ... They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him up on the third day and caused him to be seen ... by us, the witnesses God had already chosen, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. **He commanded us to preach to the people and to warn them that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead.** About him all the prophets tes-*

tify, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name, **Acts 10:34-43**.

While Peter was still speaking, **the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the message** ... the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God ... So he gave orders to have them baptized in the name of Jesus Christ ... **44-48; 11:1-18**.

Now **those who had been scattered** because of the persecution that took place over Stephen's death went ... speaking the message to no one but Jews. But **there were some men ... among them who came to Antioch and began to speak to the Greeks [Gentiles] too**, proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number turned to the Lord, **Acts 11:19-21**.

Sainthood & Priesthood

God's words to Moses for the Israelites, **if you will diligently listen to me and keep my covenant, then you will be my special possession [unique] out of all the nations ... and you will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation [separate and distinct from the rest of the nations]**, **Ex.19:5-6** **[the prophets later narrowed this promise to apply to the faithful remnant, Rom.9:27]**. Christians, **v.11:25**, are set apart (sanctified) to serve Him as mediators (priests) for the world, bringing God's presence and blessings to other nations through their unique, God-honoring lives, worship, and witness. It signifies a people dedicated to God, reflecting His character, and **serving as a bridge between Him and humanity**.

you yourselves, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood and to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, 1 Pt.2:5. Verses 9-10 apply these terms to **all believers in Jesus**, calling them **a chosen race, a royal priest-hood, a holy nation, a people of his own ...**

Believers have direct access to God through Jesus Christ, are chosen & sanctified - royal (kings, sharing Christ's reign) and "priests" (mediators, offering worship and service). It's **a collective identity**, forming a holy nation and chosen people, working together as a community of faith. It echoes God's promise to Israel in **Ex.19:6** (a kingdom of priests, a holy nation), fulfilled and extended in the NT to include every follower of Jesus. While Israel had a special priestly class supported by tithes, **apdx.13 the New Covenant fulfills and extends a priestly function and sainthood to all believers in Christ**, meaning that **there are no special priestly offices or need for church recognition of particular people as saints under the NC** because every Christian is holy to God & serves God in that capacity directly interceding for other living people, **RPCD - Chap, p.13-14**. [cf **NCT & Baptist Distinctives, p.7-9**].

The NT promotes non-hierarchical ministry & it never refers to Christian ministers as priests; this is a title reserved for all the people of God (or for the Lord Jesus alone.) The NT uses the word (ἱερεύς, hierous) priest in three ways: to refer to priests under the Old Covenant; the Lord Jesus in his eternal, Melchizedekian, priesthood; the common birthright of all Christians. **It knows nothing of a sacerdotal class in contrast to the laity**, cf **Glossary, p12**.

We do not find the idea of a Christian priesthood where some have rights and prerogatives beyond what any believer has. Importing what properly belonged to the Old Covenant into the New has been a common practice and misunderstanding right along, cf p.2 above; **New Covenant Church, p3-6**. Under the Levitical priesthood there was a definite hierarchy with Aaron as the high priest, his sons as priests, and the Levites as their assistants. The priest alone could present an offering on behalf of an Israelite, and only the high priest could enter into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. At Christ's death, the veil that separated the most holy place from the rest of the tabernacle was torn, **Lk.23:45-46; Mk.15: 37-38; Heb.10:19-20**, symbolizing that the way into God's presence has been opened for his people. The point of much in the book of Hebrews is to draw a contrast between old and new covenants. We now have *a better covenant, enacted on better promises*.

Throughout Christian history, we find this tendency to bring into the New what belonged to the Old. Special vestments for priests (Leviticus); special privileges belonging only to some (Mosaic code). These are absent from the NT. OT hierarchical traditions have nothing to do with what the NT teaches.^h

through Christ we both [Gentiles & Jews] have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household, Eph.2:18-19.

h. Some years after Annas, the high priest (archiereus) from AD 7-14, a mere puppet of Rome, had been deposed by a Roman procurator, he was still called the high priest, **Lk.3:2; Acts 4:6**. The writers of the Gospels attributed the high-priesthood to a caste rather than to a person. Annas was a man whose age, wealth, and family connections gave him a preponderant influence by which he held the real sacerdotal power. At this time the high-priesthood was in the hands of a clique of some half dozen families, **Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words, 1966, p.210-211**.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEqbyi1-tll> People of God, Wayne Watson

Praying to Deceased Christians: This practice borders on false worship.

... In a little while you will not see me [crucifixion]; again after a little while, you will see me [resurrection] ... you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you [ascension]. At that time you will ask me nothing [there will be no need for him to make petitions on our behalf] ... [but] whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you ... For the Father himself loves you [we, his children, can approach the father directly, without going through an earthly intermediary] ... Jn.16:17-27 ...

if anyone [of us] sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, 1 Jn. 2:1. Jesus holds his priesthood permanently since he lives forever. So he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them, Heb.7: 24-25. Christ ... is at the right hand of God ... interceding for us, Rom.8:34. For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself a human, 1 Tim.2:5.

the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how we should pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us [now] ... [He] intercedes on behalf of the saints according to God's will, **Rom. 8:26-27**.

Praying for the Dead

The **FINAL STATE** is our soul's condition when we reach the point of final consequences, at or before death [GT#6, p.20]. He that believes in Christ has been forgiven, completely cleansed and made righteous forever.

this is the way **God loved the world**: God gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish [which they will if they don't] but have eternal life [which they will if they do]. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through [believing in] him. **The one who believes in him is not condemned**. The one who does not believe [spurns God's love] has been condemned already ... **Jn.3:16-18**.

I urge that requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanks be offered on behalf of all [living] people, even for kings [Nero was emperor of the Roman empire at this time] and all who are in authority, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. **Such prayer for all is good and welcomed before God** our Savior, since he wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth [during their lives by believing the Gospel]. **For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity**, Christ Jesus, himself a human, **1 Tim.2:1-5**.

... we urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, I heard you at the acceptable time, and in the day of salvation I helped you. **Now is the acceptable time; Now is the day of salvation!** [cf **Christ Our Sabbath**], **2 Cor.6:1-2**. While the context refers to the gospel age as a whole, the verse is fitting for any individual who is unprepared to face the inevitable incapacity and/or death and the judgment that follows, **Rom.5:12; 1 Cor.15:26; Heb.9:27**. Death is final, and after that, no amount of praying will avail a person of the salvation he might have had in life had he believed and persevered [cf **Dynamics of Gods Judgment**, p.2-3; **GT#6**, p.19-20].

Paul Rebukes Peter

Now this matter arose because of the **false brothers with false pretenses** [Judiazers who held that Gentile converts should be circumcised and obey the law of Moses] who slipped in unnoticed to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, to enslave us [again to the law]. But **we did not surrender to them even for a moment**, in order that the truth of the gospel would remain with you, **Gal.2:4-5**.

when Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, **I opposed him to his face, because he had clearly done wrong** [and should have known better, **Acts 10:1-11, 18**]. Until certain people came from James, he had been eating with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he stopped doing this and **separated himself because he was afraid** of those who were pro-circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also joined with him in this hypocrisy, so that **even Barnabas was led astray** ... But when I saw that they were not behaving consistently with the truth of the gospel [that all men are brothers in Christ], I said to Cephas ... If you, a Jew, live like a Gentile [by not observing Jewish customs like kosher dietary restrictions] and not like a Jew, how can you try to force the Gentiles to live like Jews? ... we

know that **no one is justified by the works of the law but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ**. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by the faithfulness of Christ and not by [our observance] of the law [an illegitimate use – making the law the grounds of acceptance with God], because **by the works of the law no one will be justified** [an absolute], **Gal.2:11-16**.

The Rise of Paul

In the Book of Acts **the last significant mention of Peter** is in **Chap.12**, where he miraculously escaped from prison and told the church in Jerusalem to inform James before leaving for another place, **v.17**. He briefly reappeared at the Jerusalem Council in **Acts 15** to confirm his experience with Gentile's conversion, but this was a brief, secondary role. **Peter then faded from the narrative**, with **Luke's focus shifting to Paul's missionary journeys**, highlighting the expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles for the rest of the book. 2 NT epistles are attributed **Peter** and 13 to Paul. Nevertheless, **there is no foundation for Petrine, Pauline, or any apostolic succession**.

APPENDICES

apdx.1 **The sad state of Judaism was famously pointed out at Jesus' last trip to Jerusalem** [aka Triumphant Entry] where he **entered into the temple and looked around** before retiring to Bethany with his 12 disciples, **Mk.11:11**. What he saw there determined what he did the following day.

The next day on the way back to the temple ... **he noticed a fig tree ... When he came to it he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, **May no one ever eat fruit from you again** ...** The fig tree represents the nation of Israel here. **Jesus was pronouncing and forecasting final judgment upon the religious establishment that had been ruling the temple**, saying I'm done with you! I'm putting an end to this! **12-14**.

When they came to Jerusalem, **Jesus entered the temple area [and began acting out his fury with them, taking back what was his]** by driving out those who were selling and buying in the temple courts [the Outer Court, aka the Court of the Gentiles was a public area. Non-Jews, women, and ritually impure individuals were restricted to the outer areas that were filled with the hubbub and distraction of business activity. It was walled off from the inner court (or Court of the Priests), a sacred, restricted space designed primarily for priests to perform daily duties **that served as a purified transitional area between the public outer court and the Holy of Holies**]. He turned over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves, and he would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. Then he began to teach them and said, **Is it not written: **My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?** [Isa.56:3-7** assured god-fearing non-Jews that they would be allowed to worship God in the temple] **But you [rulers of the temple] have turned it into a den of robbers!** [by taking financial advantage of the worshipers by setting up shop on temple grounds to sell sacrificial animals at exorbitant prices, they defiled the sanctity of God's house] ... When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city, **15-19**.

In the morning ... **they saw the fig tree withered from the roots** ... Jesus said to them, **Have faith in God. I tell you the truth, if someone says to this mountain [Temple Mount *], Be lifted up and thrown into the sea [figurative language for end of the Old covenant era and irrelevance of the temple, Mt.24:1-2, 14-21; Mk.13:1-2, 14-19; Lk. 21:5-6, 20-24; Jn.4:20-24], and does not doubt in his**

heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. For this reason I tell you, whatever you pray and ask [the Father] for, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours, 20-24 ...

* **The First Temple** (Solomon's) was destroyed by the Babylonians, and **the Second Temple** (Herod's) was completely dismantled and burned by Roman forces under Titus in 70 AD. Roman soldiers tore it apart stone by stone to retrieve melted gold from its fire-ravaged inner structures and scattered the rubble in the city. The site transitioned through Byzantine neglect to Islamic rule in 638 AD, with major structures built around 692 AD. The Temple Mount currently houses the Islamic Al-Aqsa Mosque compound (Haram al-Sharif), including the Dome of the Rock.

apdx.2 The main Jewish leaders in Jesus' time were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes, who represented different religious and political viewpoints. Other important figures included the High Priest, such as Annas and Caiaphas, and various elders who held authority.

Pharisees: A large religious group known for strictly observing both written and traditional laws. They believed in the resurrection of the dead and were influential among the common people.

Sadducees: A theologically unorthodox, more worldly, and politically minded priestly group who accepted only the written law of Moses and denied the resurrection of the dead and the existence of spirits.

Scribes: Experts in Jewish law who served as teachers and interpreters of the Scriptures. They could belong to either the Pharisee or Sadducee party, and were often respected but also rebuked by Jesus for their hypocrisy.

Elders: The respected older men who held power within the community and often served on councils. They frequently conspired with scribes and priests against Jesus.

The **High Priest** held the most powerful religious and political position, often under Roman influence. **Caiaphas** was the high priest during Jesus' ministry, while **Annas** was a former high priest who still held significant influence.

Sanhedrin, aka the **council**, **Mt.5:22**. The supreme Jewish court, which held significant power in religious and legal matters. In NT times it was composed of chief priests, elders, and teachers of the law [scribes]. Under Roman jurisdiction, they were not authorized to impose capital punishment.

Zealots: A political group that sought to overthrow Roman rule by force. Jesus' disciple **Simon** was a Zealot before he became a disciple of Jesus.

Essenes: A separatist group known for their focus on ritual purity who may have been responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Herodians: A political group that supported the Herodian dynasty and its rulers. They are mentioned as antagonists to Jesus in some Gospel passages [cf **Coming of the Kingdom**, p.3 & 9-10].

The **Talmud** is the central text of Rabbinic Judaism, a massive collection of Jewish law, ethics, phi-

osophy, and lore, compiled from centuries of rabbis discussing and interpreting the Hebrew Bible as an "Oral Torah". It's like a massive library of debates, legal rulings, stories, and wisdom, structured around the core law and commentaries on it. [cf Mt.7:28-29; Mk.1:22; Lk.4:32]

Synagogues began to emerge during the Babylonian exile in the 6th century BC. As Jews were separated from their homeland, they developed synagogues as meeting places to read the Torah and **maintain their religious identity** without the central Temple in Jerusalem. **The synagogue** became the central institution for this new form of Jewish life, and **rabbis**, as experts in Jewish law and tradition, eventually became the formal spiritual leaders. Rabbis, spiritual leaders or religious teachers, were an established part of first-century Judaism. The main **types of rabbis** are based on the Jewish denomination they belong to, such as Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist, each with different approaches to Jewish law and tradition. **They began to make meticulous rules and regulations governing the daily life of the Jewish people**. These were interpretations and applications of the the law of Moses handed down from generation to generation. In Jesus' day this **tradition of the elders** was in oral form and considered to be binding, **Mk.7:1-5; Mt.15:2**.

Today's **Messianic Judaism** is a movement of Jewish people who believe Jesus is the Messiah, **blending Jewish traditions** (like observing Shabbat, holidays, keeping some kosher laws) with core Christian beliefs (Jesus as divine Son of God/Trinity). They see themselves as a unique form of Judaism. They worship in Messianic synagogues, often blending Hebrew and English, using Jewish liturgy with New Testament readings, focusing on Jesus's fulfillment of prophecy. **They identify culturally as Jewish but spiritually as followers of Jesus**.

apdx.3 A denominational church is a local church that is formally affiliated with a larger, organized religious body (denomination) that shares common beliefs, name, and history. Unlike non-denominational churches, which are independent, denominational churches typically follow a governing structure and directives from this larger organization regarding things like leadership and dogma. **There are more than 200 Christian denominations in the U.S and 45,000 worldwide** [cf **NCT & Baptist Distinctives, p.9-10**].

Churches are formally linked to a larger group of congregations, often over a wide geographical area. The churches within the denomination **operate under a common statement of faith and a single administrative hierarchy**. The broader denomination often sets directives for the local churches regarding leadership, membership, and other aspects of the faith. They are identifiable by specific traits like name, particular history, and sometimes founder. Common examples include Presbyterian, Methodist, and Lutheran churches.

A non-denominational church is a Christian church that is not affiliated with any specific, larger **Christian denomination**. These churches are **independent**, making their own decisions on leadership, beliefs, and practices, though they generally uphold core Christian beliefs like the authority of the Bible and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

apdx.4 Jesus used figurative language a lot. Sometimes he clarified his meaning. Frankly, even when he explained what he was talking about, it seems that very few people understood his meaning at the time. His disciples were no exception. Even today there are all sorts of divisions over what he meant. **Almost all OT prophecies were given in language pertaining to our natural realm -- Some were fulfilled just as given (Gen.15:13-16 = Ex.12:32-40; Num.14:34 = Dt.8:2; etc.), but most were not fulfilled in a strict literal sense (e.g., Gen.17:5 = Rom.4:17; Gen.22:17 = Mt.16:18; etc.) of RPCD, Chap-2, p.3-5; RPCD, Apdx – F, p.8-9.** Biblical evidence suggests that we **look for a spiritual interpretation of the OT prophets, [including John the Baptist & Jesus,] and Revelation**, allowing the plain teaching of the rest of Scripture to guide us.

Figurative Language needs to be explained or interpreted to be understood: Examples
[cf Understanding the Book of Revelation]

In the **Parable of the Sower**, Jesus taught about the qualification for entering the kingdom of God. The seeds a farmer was broadcasting represent the spreading of God's word in the world. **The four different places seeds landed represent people that heard it and what happened.** (1) *Some seeds fell **along the path** where it were trampled on and the birds came and ate it up. This represents people who hear the word, then the devil takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved ... **Mk.4:1-20** [each of these outcomes represents the final state of people, cf **Summary of Christianity, p.3-4; GT#6, p.19-20**].*

*... A Greek woman ... came to Jesus, pleading, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! For my daughter is possessed by a demon that torments her severely ... Then Jesus said to the woman, I was sent only to help God's lost sheep of Israel ... **It isn't right to take food from the children [Israelites] and throw it to the dogs [Gentiles].** She replied, That's true, Lord, but **even dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall beneath their masters' table.** Dear woman, Jesus said to her, your faith is great [as seen by her understanding, cf **Mt.8:5-13; Lk.7:1-10**]. Your request is granted. And her daughter was instantly healed, **Mt.15:22-28; Mk.7:25-30.***

*A man named Lazarus was sick ... when Jesus heard about it he said, Lazarus's sickness will not end in death. **It happened ... so that the Son of God will receive glory from this [God's purpose].** Lazarus has fallen asleep, but now I will go and wake him up. The disciples ... **thought Jesus meant Lazarus was simply sleeping, but Jesus meant Lazarus had died ... Jn.11:1-14.***

The Lord's Supper

The Passover was the commemoration of the last plague and judgment on Egypt which freed Israel from slavery [**Ex.12**]. **Jesus instituted a new memorial ceremony in his blood** [ie, death – a metaphorical connection with the sacrifice of the Passover lamb that was to be consumed at the meal] representing himself as the sacrificial lamb that **symbolized a new era beginning with his imminent substitutionary death and looks forward to the last era that would begin with his second coming.**

*Then **the day for the feast of Unleavened Bread** ^{apdx.14} **came, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed** ... taking the cup [of wine], Jesus gave thanks and ... then took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, **This bread [represents] my***

body, which is given for you . **Do this in remembrance of me** [This is the only elaboration given. The passage is therefore subject to the basic premise and fundamental rule **below**]. And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, **This cup that is poured out for you [represents] the new covenant [Jer.31:31-34] in my blood [cf New Covenant Church, p.8] ; Lk.22:7-20; Mt.26: 17-29; Mk.14:12-25; 1 Cor.11:23-26.**

The central purpose as stated is to **remember Jesus' sacrifice, 1 Cor.11:23-25, that marks the new covenant** established through his death, **Lk.22:20**. Sharing in the **one loaf symbolizes the unity of believers, 1 Cor.10:16-17**. It proclaims the Gospel (death & resurrection) and **looks forward to the sequel, Christ's second coming, v.11:26**. A **literalistic interpretation** of this passage has led to more ridiculous speculation than any other.

Major Protestant/Catholic Distinctions

Transubstantiation - Catholic: the elements (bread & wine) actually transform into the physical body and blood of Jesus, though their outward appearance remains bread & wine.

Consubstantiation - Lutheran: Christ's body/blood coexist with the elements - are truly present "in, with, and under" the elements [???].

Spiritual Presence - Reformed/Calvinist: Christ is spiritually, not physically, present; believers receive Him by faith, nourished spiritually by the elements [???].

Memorialism - Zwinglian/Baptist: the elements are **purely symbolic, to commemorate** Christ's sacrifice.

Sacramental Union: Some traditions (like **Presbyterianism**) see Christ's true body and blood given to believers in a way that transcends simple symbolism but isn't physical fusion [???].

Figurative language

In a little while you won't see me anymore. But a little while after that, you will see me again. Some of the disciples questioned, What does he mean when he says, In a little while you won't see me, but then you will see me, and I am going to the Father? ... [Throughout the whole passage, chap. 14-16] I have spoken of these matters in figures of speech, but soon I will stop speaking figuratively and will tell you plainly all about the Father ... Jn.16:16-18, 25-29.

I am the door of the sheep, Jn.10:7, 9, stresses that **no one can enter the kingdom of heaven by any means other than Christ Himself**. Jesus' words in this passage are couched in the imagery of a sheepfold. **He is represented as the gate of the sheepfold, the one and only legitimate way to enter the pen.** *He who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way is a thief and a robber, v.1.*

I am the resurrection and the life, Jn.11:25. Jesus made this proclamation immediately before raising Lazarus from the dead. Again, we see that Jesus' teaching was not just empty talk; when He made a claim, He substantiated it with action. He holds **the keys of death and the grave, Rev. 1: 18**. In raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus showed how He can fulfill Yahweh's promise to ancient Israel: *[God's] dead shall live; their bodies shall rise, Isa.26:19*. Apart from Jesus, there is neither resurrection nor eternal life, **Eph.4**.

There are two instances of *I am* statements in the Gospel of John that are not metaphors; rather, they are declarations of God's name, as applied by Jesus to Himself [Ex.3:5-6]. The first instance Jesus designates Himself as I AM is in Jn.8:23-24. Jesus replied to the Jewish leaders, You are from below; I am from above. You are from this world; I am not from this world ... unless you believe that I am [he (the Christ, Jn.20:31) implied] you will die in your sins.

The second instance comes as Jesus responds to a complaint by the Judeans. Jesus says, before Abraham came into being [became, change of status, aorist tense], I am [always was, imperfect (impf) tense, cf Genesis in Space & Time, p.22]! Jn.8:58. The Greek verbs and tenses Jesus uses are in stark contrast with each other: Abraham had a beginning, but Christ always existed [cf. Rev.1:8]. In Jn.1:1, the Word who [already] was is used 3 times, and again in v.2. V.3 uses the word became [came into being] 3 times to describe the creation of all things].

apdx.5 The 66 books of the Christian Bible were not "chosen" by a single decision but were recognized over several centuries as being divinely inspired through a process called **canonization**.

Early Christians, including church leaders and councils, used criteria like apostolic authority, orthodoxy (theological consistency with other accepted scriptures), and ecclesiastical usage (widespread acceptance across the church) to confirm which books were authoritative and divinely inspired. Key councils like the Council of Hippo in 393 AD and the Council of Carthage in 397 AD formally affirmed the list of books that were already widely trusted and used by believers.

apdx.6 There are two groups of **apocrypha** (OT & NT). ALL of them were excluded from the Bible prior to 1546 AD when the Catholic Church added 12 books at the Council of Trent. They were incorporated as a direct reaction to the Protestant Reformation, which rejected these books as non-canonical. This decision was largely a counter-Reformation measure to provide scriptural basis for doctrines like praying for the dead and purgatory, which Reformers challenged. It solidified the inclusion of books like Tobit, Judith, 1 & 2 Maccabees, and Wisdom, which supported certain Catholic doctrines, creating a lasting division with Protestants who generally exclude them from the biblical canon.

For centuries, the status of these books was mixed; some Church Fathers quoted them, while others, like Jerome, rejected them, though they were often included in the Greek Septuagint (the Old Testament used by early Christians). The Council of Trent formally declared the deuterocanonical (second canon) books as Scripture, defining the canon for Roman Catholicism. Many other texts exist, like Enoch, Jubilees, and various Gospels or Acts (NT Apocrypha) that aren't usually in standard collections.

apdx.7 The Hebrew word **kosher** means fit or proper as it relates to Jewish dietary law. Kosher foods are permitted to be eaten, and can be used as ingredients in the production of additional food items. The basic laws are of Biblical origin, Lev.11 & Dt.17. For thousands of years, Rabbinic scholars have been interpreting these laws and applying them to contemporary situations. In addition,

Rabbinic bodies enacted protective legislation to safeguard the integrity of kosher practices. The laws of kosher are complex and extensive.

Are you so dull? Don't you see that **nothing [physical] that enters a person from the outside can [spiritually] defile them**? For it doesn't go into their heart [defile their inner being] but into their stomach, and then out of the body. (In saying this, **Jesus stated an absolute by declaring all foods clean**), **Mk.7:18-20; Mt.15:17-19**.

the Spirit explicitly says that **in the later times some will desert the faith and occupy themselves with deceiving spirits and demonic teachings, influenced by the hypocrisy of liars** whose consciences are seared. They will prohibit marriage and require abstinence from foods [myths fit only for the godless and gullible, v.7] that God created to be received with thanksgiving **by those who believe and know the truth**. For every creation of God is good and no food is to be rejected ... **1 Tim.4:1-4**.

With regard then to eating food sacrificed to idols, **we know that an idol in this world is nothing ... But this knowledge is not shared by all**. And **some, by being accustomed to idols in former times, eat this food as an idol sacrifice, and their conscience, because it is weak, is defiled**. Now **food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse if we do not eat and no better if we do [this is absolute]**. But be careful that this liberty of yours does not become a hindrance to the weak ... So by your knowledge the weak brother or sister ... is destroyed. **If you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ**. For this reason, if food causes my brother or sister to sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I may not cause one of them to sin [this NT caveat is a **controlling exception to the exercise of our freedom**], **1 Cor.8:4-13; 10: 23-33**.

apdx.8 For freedom Christ has set us free [from the yoke of the law]. **Stand firm, then, and do not be subject again to [caught or entangled in] the yoke of slavery [burdened by the rigorous demands of the law as the means for gaining God's favor]**. Listen! ... if you let yourselves be circumcised [to please God], Christ will be of no benefit to you at all! [conclusion] ... every man who lets himself be circumcised is obligated to obey the whole law [logical inference] ... For in Christ Jesus **neither [physical] circumcision nor uncircumcision carries any weight [has any value, definitive pronouncement]** ... **Gal.5:1-6**.

BASIC PREMISE: Physical ceremonies, or activities (such as baptism by immersion) **depict, typify, or signify spiritual realities - they are not causes, GT#2, p.14**. **God's Kingdom is spiritual in nature**. It can **only be entered through spiritual regeneration** [supernatural rebirth, God ... made His light to shine in our hearts ... **2 Cor.4:6**] which cannot be accomplished by a duly appointed minister, priest, prayer, formula, incantation, religious ceremony, ritual, rite, icon, statue, token, relic, or pageantry. **It is completely within the discretion, purview, and power of the Holy Spirit**.

There is a **Fundamental Prescriptive Rule** here. With respect to interpretation of important doctrines, if the NT doesn't clearly say **to do** something, there is no foundation to treat it as a divinely authorized practice. For instance, **the NT knows nothing about priestly or apostolic succession** [**GT-apdx.10, p.15-16**]. It emphasizes one's faith in Jesus, adherence to God's Word under the New Covenant, and the culmination of the OT imagery in his 1st & 2nd comings [cf **Summary of Chris-**

tianity, p.1]. Implications are always relevant.

Circumcision

Circumcision of the heart is a metaphor for a profound, internal purification and dedication to God - a spiritual transformation where God removes stubbornness, resistance, sin, and idolatry, replacing it with a heart that loves and obeys Him, fulfilled in the New Covenant through the Holy Spirit. Christians experience this **circumcision of Christ** on the cross, where Jesus bore the penalty of being *cut off* from God, freeing believers from sin's curse. Cutting away pride, selfishness, and false gods. The New Testament describes the heart's circumcision as the core of the new covenant, where God replaces the physical cutting of flesh with an internal renewal through faith in Jesus.

Circumcise your hearts, then, and do not be stiff-necked any longer, Dt.10:16.

The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, Dt.30:6.

[spiritual transformation through the Spirit] A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and true circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code, Rom.2:28-29.

In Him you were also circumcised with a [spiritual] circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, Col.2:11.

apdx.9 The institutional hierarchy of the Catholic Church is often criticized for the systematic **cover-up of sexual abuse**, prioritizing the reputation of the Church over the protection of victims. During the Age of Discovery, 15th–19th centuries, the Church often acted as a partner to European powers, **authorizing the enslavement of indigenous populations and aiding in forced conversions** in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Instances such as the **forced recantation of Galileo Galilei** in the 17th century highlighted the hierarchy's prioritization of dogma over scientific evidence. The Church has been criticized for centuries of **discrimination against Jews**, including actions that enabled persecution and the failure to speak out effectively against the Nazi Holocaust. **Corruption and Inaction**: the hierarchy has faced accusations of **valuing political power over justice**, such as tacit support for apartheid in South Africa.

apdx.10 REGENERATION & IT'S PICTURE

*in the ark ... eight souls, were delivered [from judgment] through water. And **this prefigured baptism, which now saves you** [metaphorically, as an antitype]—not the washing off of physical dirt but the pledge [response, answer] of a good conscience to God—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ... 1 Pt.3:20-21.*

*... as many as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. [Explanation] Therefore we have been **buried** with him through baptism into **death**, in order **that just as Christ was raised from the dead** [baptism by immersion is a graphic depiction of what happens as a result of*

our union with Christ through faith] through the glory of the Father, so we too may live life on a new plane [Francis Schaeffer's term for this is **active passivity**]. For [it follows that] if [it is true that] we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be united in the likeness of his resurrection, **Rom.6:3-5**.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON: ... It was appropriate to celebrate and be glad, for your brother was dead, and is alive [pictures Christian conversion, portrayed by the ceremony of baptism by immersion, cf **Summary, p.1**] ; he was lost and is found, **Lk.15.28-32; 19:10** .

... there is joy in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who repents, **15:10 & 7**. This is who I am.

What prompted Jesus to give these three parables (lost sheep, lost coin, & lost son) in the first place? It was the haughty attitude of the Pharisees and experts in the law who were complaining about Jesus because tax collectors and sinners [they considered to be unworthy people] were coming to hear him, and he was welcoming and eating [celebrating] with them, **Lk.15:1-2 ; 5:29-32**. This is who Christians are.

PAEDOBAPTISM vs CREDOBAPTISM [cf **NCT & Baptist Distinctives, p.5-7**].

People generally have a problem figuring out what God does about infants and young children [3-4 years old] who die. We can't stand the idea that they would be condemned to hell as unbelievers so we are prone to concoct some way to circumvent it. Abram & Sarai were also rationalists who believed God yet couldn't understand how God could give them an heir. So they tried to work around the problem rationalistically [GT#1, p.7]. They were hampered by ignorance of what God was planning and how he intended to bring it about [p.8]. At this point, they didn't really know God or that he was training them to think supernaturally so they approached the problem the only way they knew – naturalistically. They were in the process of being trained to TRUST God and so are we. All of us must learn to function by faith – Always give God the benefit of the doubt. Interpret all things in his favor. In other words, let us place a positive construction on the events and circumstances of our lives because God is good, he cares for us, and does what is right > always, **Eph.5:20; 1 Thes.5:18**. [GT#6, p.1].

CLARIFYING SCRIPTURE, cf **GT, APDX-5, p.8-12**: The Bible often requires us to fill in the obvious words to complete the thought and clarify its meaning. An example of how Scripture is to be interpreted from Abraham's Four Seeds, **apdx.4**, demonstrates how one's theological framework affects his reading of Scripture. [cf **Children of Abraham, p.1-7; AFS Theological Notes, p.12, 28-33**] For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call, **Acts 2:39** [Peter's address to the crowd at Pentecost, **Acts 2:14-40**] Peter understood the gospel promise of **whosoever in Joel** to include three distinct groups, in the last days ... I will pour out my Spirit on all people ... [so that] everyone who calls on the name of the Lord [qualification] will be saved [from God's wrath, **p.19-20**] **Acts 2: 17-21**.

1. unto you, [unconverted convicted sinners who repent and believe]
and the same promise is [understood]
2. to your children, [themselves, not by proxy] if they repent and believe [understood]

and likewise the same promise is [understood]

3. to all who are afar off [in heathen Gentile lands]

if they also repent and believe the same gospel [understood]

Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21	Acts 2:38-40
And it shall come to pass	The promise is unto
that <u>whosoever</u> shall call upon the Lord	(1) <u>You</u> , and to (2) <u>your children</u> , (3) and to <u>all that are afar off</u>
v.28-29 shall be saved there will be deliverance	shall receive the gift of the Spirit (v.38) shall be saved (v.40)
among <u>the remnant</u> whom the lord shall call .	even <u>as many as</u> the Lord our God shall call .

objections to using **Acts 2:39** as a proof text for infant baptism:

a. Who was Peter speaking to, unbelievers or Christian parents? **Was he telling convicted sinners how to be saved**, or giving believing parents the assurance that their children are in the covenant? The *you* in the phrase *the promise is unto you (v.39)* refers to unbelievers asking *what should we do [to be saved, v.37]*. In the very next verse Peter exhorted **these unsaved people, save yourselves from this corrupt generation, v.40**. Can an exhortation to lost sinners to trust Christ be interpreted as a promise to Christian parents that their children are in a special covenantal relationship with God? **Of course not.**

b. How can the promise in **Joel** that Peter quoted, *whosoever shall call on the Lord shall be saved [Lk.23:32-33, 40-43]*, be connected to infant baptism? (cf. **Rom.10:10-13** where Paul also quotes **Joel 2:32** and shows that **the promise spoken of in Joel and quoted by Peter is the promise of the gospel to all unbelievers whether they are Gentiles or Jews.**) Peter declaring the promise of the gospel of grace to unbelievers cannot be turned into God's making a covenant of grace with Christian parents, yet this is exactly what **covenant theologians** have done with this text.

c. Do the children of believers have more unique promise in this text than do *those who are afar off (the heathen), Acts 2:39*? Peter understood the gospel promise of *whosoever* in Joel to include the **three distinct groups charted**. Clarify who is included in the promise that *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved [from God's judgment (wrath), 19-20] Acts 2:21*.

1. Notice how clearly Peter interprets the words *whosoever* in **Joel** and *as many as* in **Acts**. What Peter is declaring is this: **Just as all people** without exception (covenant children included) **are guilty lost sinners who need to be saved, so all people** without exception **are freely invited by the one gospel of grace to believe and be saved**. Under the NC, can there be unregenerate pagan children and

unregenerate covenant children with different promises for each group? No - Peter is showing that the gospel message is for all lost sinners without distinction or exception. There is now only one category of lost people before God. No one is either inside or outside of a special covenantal category by physical birth.

2. To whom does the *even as many as the Lord our God shall call*, **Acts 2:40**, apply? All three categories mentioned in the text. Peter is saying, as many as God shall call **from among you, from among your children, and from among the heathen**. It is the sovereign effectual call of God in all three categories that determines the true objects of the promise. The one and only thing that determines whether a person is in Christ or under grace is the eternal election of God, and the only thing that proves it in time is the effectual call of the Holy Spirit. Being under a covenant of grace has nothing at all to do with physical birth. There is not a special spiritual category in Scripture for the physical children of believers to be included before God through physical birth and baptism. The promise in **Acts 2:39** was given equally to pagans, the hearers, and to their children.

3. The people addressed in Acts **2:39** were still unbelievers in **v.40**, many of whom were converted and baptized in **v.41**. Can one think and speak in terms of covenant children and non-covenant children and not wind up with **two different gospels** - one for the covenant child that includes God loves you for sure, and one for the pagan child that cannot include God loves you until we are first sure that they are one of the elect? One of the major problems created by using **Acts 2:39** as a proof text for infant baptism is that it confuses the message of the gospel of grace to all people.

Acts 2 is about our Lord Jesus Christ of whom prophecy and promises were made. The message, especially **v.39**, is that the promise has been fulfilled — the Messiah Redeemer has come — believe in Him and be saved whoever you are. There is only ONE status before God — GUILTY, regardless of who your parents are, and there is only ONE gospel message to every guilty sinner — REPENT and BELIEVE. This is the one message to the children of believers as well as the children of unbelievers. Ceremonies (such as baptism) depict realities. God's Kingdom is spiritual in nature. It can only be entered through spiritual regeneration, rebirth, which cannot be accomplished by a ceremony. *God ... made His light to shine in our hearts ... 2 Cor.4:6.*

Compare Joel 2:32 with Acts 2:21, Peter's inspired interpretation is an example of how to read the OT Scriptures in the light of its interpretation by inspired NT apostles. **The new age of the Spirit is the gospel age** predicted by Joel. Peter was stating the following facts about the kingdom.

1. WHEN would this kingdom be established?

Joel's prophecy concerned the time in which you and I live **today** and not just the future.

2. To WHOM was this kingdom promised? The promise is equally applied to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. According to Peter's interpretation of Joel's prophecy, the promise is to **whosoever** and not just the nation of Israel, **Jn.3:14-16-18, 36**.

3. HOW were the blessings of kingdom to be received? Deliverance was to be given on the basis of faith in the gospel message and had nothing at all to do with physical birth, **Jn.1:12-13**.

4. WHAT did Joel mean by deliverance? Peter says that **Joel's deliverance was spiritual salvation for Jews and Gentiles in the gospel age** (cf. **Lk.1:68-79**) [not national, political freedom for the Jews in a future earthly kingdom, cf **AFS, Apdx 4**].

Acts 2:22-24 - Jesus had all of the credentials necessary to prove that He was the Messiah; but, in spite of all the evidence, the Jews still crucified Him. However, God raised Him from the dead. Peter's emphasis proves that the Man they crucified had fulfilled the prophecies concerning the Messiah King.

V.25-28 - This resurrection of Christ from the grave was also clearly **prophesied by David**.

V.29-36 - Peter's application of the fact of the resurrection and the ascension of Christ reveals that David understood exactly what was being promised to him in **2 Sam.7**. Peter's sermon also shows that David understood both when and how the covenant promise to raise up His Son to sit on His throne would be fulfilled. **This very clear time reference is often missed when discussing the establishment of David's throne.**

Compare **2 Sam.7:12 & 1 Chron.17:11** with **Acts 2:29-31** to **see how a New Testament apostle understood and applied an Old Testament prophecy concerning the Davidic kingdom.**

2 Sam.7:12 & 1 Chron.17:11	Acts 2:29-31
	<i>Let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David,</i>
<i>And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt go to be with their fathers,</i>	<i>that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day.</i>
<i>I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels,</i>	<i>Therefore ... being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh,</i>
<i>and I will establish his Kingdom.</i>	<i>he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne;</i>
	<i>David seeing this beforehand, spoke of the resurrection of Christ ...</i>

The following facts are established by **comparison of the actual words in the prophecy and Peter's inspired interpretation of them.**

- 1.** Peter identifies the seed as Christ so there is no question as to whom the prophecy refers. Christ is the seed that was raised up (or resurrected clearly pinpoints the time of fulfillment) to sit on the throne in fulfillment of the covenant promise to David.
- 2.** Peter shows that David understood these words to be more than just a promise of the bodily resurrection of Christ. He connected the resurrection and ascension of Christ with the establishment of

the kingdom promised to David. The setting up the seed and establishing the kingdom are the same thing as raising up Christ to sit on David's throne and all of this was to happen at the same time. David was speaking of the resurrection and ascension of Christ that had just taken place (v.30-31). Peter's words mean that David's greater Son [not Solomon] was to begin sitting on the promised throne at the time of Jesus' resurrection and ascension. There is not the slightest hint of a postponed future earthly throne in Peter's words. Taking Peter's words literally, proves that the Holy Spirit deliberately spiritualized the OT prophecy of the Davidic kingdom.

3. Christ would sit on David's throne at the same time that David was still sleeping with the fathers or before David's resurrection. This is why Peter deliberately mentions that *David is both dead and buried and his sepulcher is with us unto this day*. Peter is saying, The promise to David has been fulfilled in the exact manner and at the precise time it was prophesied to David. The throne was to be established at the time of the resurrection and ascension of Christ, and it would happen while David was dead awaiting his own resurrection. (cf Acts 13:35-36)

4. The words *I will establish his kingdom* in the promise to David becomes *raise up Christ to sit on his throne* in the inspired interpretation by Peter, an event that took place at the ascension of Christ. Is there any hint in Peter's words of any expectations of a future Davidic throne or kingdom that has temporarily been postponed? No. When would David be raised from the dead if this enthronement of David's Seed were to take place during a future earthly millennium? After that millennium was over.

David's Seed is sitting on David's throne right now and that the kingdom promised to David has, in some sense, already been established at the ascension of Christ (cf 1 Chron.17:11-14). The NT does not allow us to say that Christ now sits in heaven on a throne as Lord of the church, but He will later sit on a physical throne in Palestine as King of Israel. The days of the manifestation of both the glory and the power of Christ began at his Ascension. No NT writer ever thinks or writes of such a manifestation of Christ's glory and power as being totally future.

apdx.11 It was important that the people learn at the beginning of each new era that sin would not to be dealt with lightly (the garden of Eden; universal flood; tower of Babel; giving of the law; refusal to take possession of Canaan; conquest of Jericho; the beginning of Christianity, etc.). Sin can spoil the blessing of God upon his people. When we sin, the blessing slows or stops and when either life in the church or doctrine is not cared for, the blessing stops as much as when an individual sins, GT#4, JFH, p.1, 114, 177. It can even stop for a whole group on the basis of the sin of one or a few, eg. Achan, whose sin caused the deaths of about 36 men, Josh.7:4-5. There will be judgment either from ourselves in confessing and atoning for our sin or from God [Ex.32:1-29; Num. 25: 1-13; Acts 5:1-11; Gal.2:11-14]. If we return, the blessing will flow on once more, GT#4, p.1. [In Acts 5, the judgment was death. In Gal.2, (p.18 above) the judgment upon Peter was a public rebuke and loss of prominence in the church. In both cases the judgment was appropriate for the situation and God's blessing upon the church continued.]

apdx.12 Peter's call for the disciples to select someone to take the place of Judas is illustrative of a

pattern where people with limited knowledge of God's plans attempt to fulfill scripture. **This was a humanistic work-around.** In **GT#1, p.7**, because Abram had remained childless, **he proposed a solution** (that was within the promises God had given him to this point) – that his household servant, **Eliezer**, be his heir. But God replied, *this man will **not** be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.*

Then Sarai **proposed a solution for her inability to have children** (that was also within the scope of God's promises). *She ... gave Hagar to her husband to be his wife. Abram had a son by her and she named him **Ishmael**, **Gen.16:1-4, 15**. But God said, No [this is not the son I promised] ... I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this set time next year, **17:19 & 21; GT#1, p.8**.*

Both of these proposed solutions came from their humanistic background. But God had been training them from the beginning to think supernaturally. *Now when the child reached adolescence [about 13], **God tested Abraham** by commanding: take your only son, **Isaac**, whom you love ... and sacrifice him as a burnt offering ... **Gen.22:2; GT#1, p.10**. There was no way to get around this! God had said to him, It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. **Abraham reasoned** that God could even raise the dead, **Heb.11:17-19**. With this reasoning, Abraham demonstrated that he had finally been converted from being a pragmatist; naturalist; rationalist; and humanist to a full-blown **supernaturalist**. [This same scenario played out twice more when Abram was afraid for his life and unnecessarily resorted to deception to escape, **Gen.12:10-20; GT#1, p.4-5; 20:1-18; GT#1, p.10**.]*

So God already had someone in mind to fill Judas' vacancy among the 12 apostles. **Saul is my chosen instrument** to carry my name before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel. *For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name, **Acts 9:3-19**. I did not go to ask advice from any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see **those who were apostles before me** [Paul considered himself to be an apostle] ... **Gal.1:15-17; 1 Cor.9:1-2**.*

apdx.13 In the Old Testament, tithing was closely tied to the civil and religious law of the Israelite theocracy, acting partly as a tax, a mandatory legal requirement for Israelites to give 10% of their produce and livestock to support the Levites, fund national festivals, and care for the poor. As the tribe of Levi did not receive land inheritance, these tithes served as their sustenance, with the Aaronic priests receiving a tenth of the tithes collected by the Levites. **The New Testament does not command a tithe for believers**, focusing instead on voluntary, cheerful, and proportional giving (**2 Cor.9:6-7**).

apdx.14 The **Feast of Weeks (Lev.23:15–22)**, an old covenant celebration **designed to remind Israel of the sure and certain harvest their kind God prepared for them**. It outlines the appointed feasts (**v.2**). These festivals served as a framework for Israel's life as God's people. On a weekly and annual basis, Israel would move their minds, souls, and bodies to rhythms of God's grace and provision. These rhythms were meant to shape them, again and again, in the confidence that comes from knowing the Lord.

The Feast of Weeks was one example, one rhythm that held out joy for God's people. It had four im-

portant features. (1) It required able-bodied Israelites to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship in the temple. Their offerings were to be hand-delivered (**Dt.16:10**). The worshiper would gather with others from places far and wide to see and remember that God's abundant provision knows no geographic bounds. As the Old Testament narrative marches on, we pick up **hints that God's promises would spill beyond Israel—the prophets foretold that all nations would one day flow to the temple mount to join the party (Isa.2:2)**.

(2) The Israelites were to bring grain and animals with wine as acts of worship. The varied offerings mixed themes of devotion, gratitude, forgiveness, and spiritual reconciliation (**Lev.23:16–20**). Worshipers would remember the Lord is the Giver. He is the true sustainer of our lives. **Our labors of tilling, planting, weeding, tending, and harvesting aren't the real source of our blessing**. God dealt with each person's sin and shortcomings forthrightly, offering each person the forgiveness and freedom necessary to live in the light of joy instead of the darkness of guilt and shame.

(3) The feast day was simultaneously a day to keep Sabbath (**v.21**). Because the pilgrim stayed in Jerusalem for the duration of the feast, **they were tempted to trust in self-provision**. The Feast of Weeks reminded them that the Lord reigns.

(4) As they loaded their carts for the journey, worshipers would be reminded that the edges of their fields were for others (**v.22**). **God's gracious gifts were to be shared with those whose circumstances were different**. The Feast of Weeks was about joyful confidence in God, a confidence that couldn't be shaken or set aside by circumstances, by sin and shame, or by personal striving. Yet we have a greater reason to be confident.

The Passion Week, Jesus' final days

Day 1, Palm Sun. **Entry into Jerusalem:** Jesus arrived on a donkey fulfilling **Zec.9:9**, celebrated by crowds shouting *Hosanna*, **Mt.21:1-11; Mk.11:1-11; Lk.19:28-44; Jn.12:12-19**.

Day 2, Mon: Jesus wept over Jerusalem, cursed the fig tree, cleansed the Temple, **Mt.21:12-17; Mk.11:15-19; Lk.19:41-48**.

Day 3, Tue: Jesus taught at the Temple, faced opposition, spoke parables, prophesied about the end times, gave **the Olivet Discourse**, **Mt.21-25; Mk.11-13; Lk.20-21**.

Day 4, Wed: Judas conspired with the chief priests to betray Jesus, Jesus anointed for burial, **Mt.26:14-16; Mk.14:10-11; Jn.12:1-8**.

Day 5, Thu. **The Last Supper:** Jesus washed the disciples' feet, predicted Peter's denial, prayed in Gethsemane, **Mt.26:26-46; Mk.14:22-42, Lk. 22:1-46, Jn.13:1-38**.

Day 6, Good Fri. Jesus' arrest, trials (Pilate, Herod), whipped, carried the cross, crucified (9 AM - 3 PM), death, burial, **Mt.27; Mk.15; Lk.23; Jn.19**.

Day 7, Sat. Jesus' body lay in the tomb; Jewish leaders posted guards, **Mt.27:62-66**.

Day 8, Easter Sun. Women find the tomb empty; angels announce Jesus' resurrection; Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and disciples, **Mt.28; Mk.16; Lk.24, Jn.20**.

The Lord Jesus spoke of himself as a kernel of wheat, **Jn.12:24**. He sent workers into his plentiful harvest. He made atonement as a perfect offering for sin and shame. He gives peace with God, and he, in his very person, assures us our God will most certainly give us all things, **Rom.8:32**. Our crucified, risen, ascended, and returning Lord Jesus is always working in the world by the power of his Spirit, gathering a harvest of worshipers from every tongue, tribe, and nation.

The outpouring of the Spirit in **Acts 2** on the Day of Pentecost—the celebration of the Feast of Weeks during the apostles' time—sprouts up in the soil of the biblical narrative as a fulfillment of the prophets' promise that all nations will come to Jerusalem. The Spirit fills the cup of OT imagery to the brim as Isaiah's dream is fulfilled.

LAST WORDS

I've attempted to expose a number of problems within the pale of Christianity. **GT-APDX-10, COMPLICATIONS, p.15-17** mentions some that especially relate to leadership. **Egoism** is a temptation for all people, especially for gifted men and those who hold a high rank within the hierarchy of the church or denomination. Paul was keenly aware of this and discovered the unusual form of God's grace that delivered him from arrogance.

... visions and revelations from the Lord: I ... was caught up to the third heaven ... into paradise and heard things too sacred to be put into words, things that a person is not permitted to speak ... because of the extraordinary character of the revelations. Therefore ... a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to trouble me—so that I would not become arrogant. I asked the Lord three times about this, that it would depart from me [because it was a genuine hardship]. But he said to me, My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness ... Therefore I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with troubles, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong, 2 Cor.12:1-10.

At God's direction, **Moses** struck the Nile River with his staff and all the water turned to blood, killed all the fish, and stank. **Ex.7:20-21**. Later at Horeb, God stood on a rock and had Moses strike it and water flooded out for the whole congregation and their livestock, **17:5-6**. Forty years later at Kadesh Moses stood before the next generation and the Lord had him take the staff and **speak** to the rock, **Num.20:8**. But Moses disobeyed and spoiled the portrayal of Christ's crucifixion by striking the rock in anger, exasperation, and frustration that had accumulated over the last 40 years in dealing with the Israelites. Thus the picture of the Gospel and God's holiness was corrupted. The rod of God's wrath came down once (**Ex.17:5-6**) upon his son who bore the sins of the world, completing God's justice, turning away his anger, and pouring out his grace.

Moses was provoked to ANGER at the people's constant complaining. And this boosted his self-righteousness into an uncontrollable rage. *At the waters of Meribah the people angered the LORD, causing Moses serious trouble for they aroused his temper [embittered his spirit], and he spoke rashly, Ps.106:32-33. There is a place for Godly anger ... but the exercise of it is dangerous to us because we so often mix it with egoism, JFH p.14-15.*

I have seen leaders stand before congregations, self-righteously proclaiming judgment, flogging

them to do better as Christians. **Shame on you!** Jesus said, *Feed My sheep* [with sound exegetical content] **not crush their spirits** [with endless negative criticism that takes very little preparation effort]! The Gospel is **speak to the rock** because we are surrounded by God's love, forgiveness, mercy, and grace. **There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus** [cf **War Against Propositional truth, p.2-4**].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJxrX42WcjQ> You Raise Me Up, Josh Groban

Don't sin by **letting anger control you**. Think about it overnight and remain silent [or be still, quiet your heart] **Ps.4:4 (NLT)**.

Shake [**tremble with anger**] but do not sin. When you are on your bed, look into your [own] hearts [examine yourselves] and be quiet, **Ps.4:4 (NLV)**.

In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry [We were not meant to hold grudges. Resolve your differences quickly. Don't let your anger mature into **unforgiveness**. Left to fester, even righteous anger eventually morphs into the corrosive ulcer that is **bitterness**.], and do not give **the devil** a place [an opportunity to corrupt your heart], **Eph.4:26-27; Jas.1:19-21**.

Christian songs & hymns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iF1kQMf74eE> The Prodigal Son Suite, Kieth Green

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yV6mQxlZ78g> Before the Throne of God Above, Getty

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ez5Kti_hvxU Rock of Ages, Glad (acapella)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rn9-UNer6MQ> In Christ Alone, Kieth & Kristyn Getty

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_g6th8E83d0 Your Love Broke Through, Kieth Green

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIRRTM0uk6Q> Be Ye Glad, Glad (acapella)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oibli1rz7mw> Christ Our Hope in Life and Death, Getty

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQctb0qj-HA> Easter Song, Glad (acapella)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDkl-KQB698> Joy to the World



May God Bless You