

A RESTORATIONAL DOCUMENT

Roger E. Dickson

IN SEARCH OF CHRISTIANS

AN INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

If I as a Christian were to enter the city of Antioch of Syria about fifteen years after the Passover/Pentecost of Acts 2, and go looking for a Christian, my task would be somewhat different than today. If I were to go searching for a Christian in Antioch, I would certainly go searching around for an individual with a like-minded faith as my own.

It seems that the unbelievers of the city of Antioch would have already made my search easy. They had already nicknamed those individuals who believed in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. They derogatorily referred to them as “Christians.” About fifteen years after the Acts 2 Pentecost, the unbelievers of Antioch came up with this reference to those who followed Christ. So Luke, the historian, wrote, “*And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch*” (At 11:26). They were called “Christians,” not by Christians themselves, but by those who did not believe in or follow Christ.

Now suppose for a moment. Since we would have been looking in Antioch for people who were disciples of Christ, then the unbelievers of the city had already made our search easy. All we had to do is inquire around for any individual who was ridiculed by the idolatrous unbelievers, or even Jewish unbelievers, to be followers of Christ. We might have in-

quired at the local market, “Do you know of any individuals in town who are followers of Christ? The unbelievers would possibly have responded, “Oh, those Christians! There is one of them working at the fruit stand on the other side of the street.” And so, our search would have ended with a particular individual at a fruitstand who believed and behaved as a disciple of Christ. From that individual we would have been successful in finding a “Christian.”

In order to be successful in our search in Antioch, we would not have been able to find a “church house” full of Christians on Fifth and Main. Neither would we have been successful in our search by finding some assembly of disciples in someone’s house. Our search would have been for individuals, for people who followed Christ.

So in our search today, we too seek for people who are so different in their beliefs and behavior that they are identified in any community as “Christians.” Our search must first be for people who believe and behave as Christ, and thus, are His disciples (followers) in any city. Therefore, if we could have entered the city of Antioch over two thousand years ago in order to find a disciple of Christ, then we would have gone looking for individuals who believed and behaved after the manner Christ. And so it is the same with our search today.

If you have come to this book looking for people who are uniquely defined by specific catechisms they faithfully believe and legally obey, then you might be somewhat disappointed. I have written this document in order to restore the thinking of people of faith as the disciples of Christ. This book has been written in order to encourage the fellowship of those who have made a collective effort to believe that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God who voluntarily came from heaven into our flesh, and then allowed this flesh to be nailed to a cross

as a redemptive sacrifice for all those who would believe on Him, and subsequently, respond to His gospel¹ news of coming into this world. He came in order that He might come again in a cloud at the end of time in order to collect us into that cloud that we might be ushered into eternal dwelling. This book, therefore, is not about sifting through a catalog of books on theology in order to organize codes and catechisms that might identify the collective of believers who are disciples of Christ. On the contrary, it is about our response to Christ. It is about identifying the gospel driven nature of people who have responded to the incredible story of God who died on a cross for sin-stained souls.

• **An incredible journey:** The historical episode of the Son of God coming into flesh, going to the cross, being resurrected, and ascending to heaven were so fantastic that two thousand years ago it socially turned the ancient world upside down (At 17:6). So our curiosity in this matter is likewise so overwhelming that we are driven into the Holy Spirit-inspired record of these events in order to discover the Cause and effect (church) of such a dynamic turnaround in the lives of people. After we discover the wonder of the gospel, it is then, in a confused religious world, that we begin our diligent search to discover in the Holy History Book characteristics that identified the first Christians. We search for that which is true. We encourage others, likewise, to join with us in digging ourselves out of the prevailing quagmire of religious confusion of today in order to be disciples of the One who came for us. We search for those who want to be Christians only.

• **An incredible message:** There is no message more excit-

¹ - When we use the English word "gospel," we are first understanding the word as it is defined by the Greek dictionary. The word means "good news." But in order not to confuse the gospel with the Bible as a whole that reports the gospel, the word "gospel" refers to the historical events of the Son of God coming into the flesh of man (incarnation), being crucified on the cross as a sacrificial offering for our sins, His resurrection for our hope, ascension as a sign of victory over this world, His present kingdom reign over all things, and finally, His coming again in order to receive us unto Himself for eternal dwelling.

ing in the world today than the message of the Son of God coming into this world in the flesh of man. He came in order to demonstrate His love for His creation (Rm 5:8; Cl 1:16). Once the demonstration was completed on a cross outside Jerusalem, He promised to come again in order to take His gospel-respondent children—that's us—out of this world and into eternal glory.

- **An incredible cleansing:** In order to accomplish the purpose for His incarnational journey of love to deliver us out of this world and into His loving eternal presence, Jesus had to demonstrate that He was from the only God of love and grace. And in order to do this, there had to be a sacrificial offering to sanctify all those He would take out of this world. This sanctifying sacrifice was necessary in order to cleanse us of sin that separates us from the eternal God into whose presence the Son seeks to deliver us when He comes again (See Is 59:1,2). This sacrifice thus demanded His crucifixion. If we would participate in this good news, therefore, there are conditions on our part in order to connect with His atoning crucifixion. The benefits of the gospel journey of the Son of God was and is conditioned on our faithful obedient response to His journey into and out of this world for us.

- **An incredible hope:** We responded to His awesome love because we needed hope in the midst of a world of suffering and physical death. We needed the proof that only a resurrection can provide. And therefore, He delivered this proof by first being resurrected from the dead never to die again. But still, this was not enough. We needed an example of how to be delivered from this present world of suffering. This good news was illustrated by His own ascension to God, His Father and ours. Therefore, He ascended out of this world in order to reign at the right hand of the Father. This is the gospel message of hope that we needed! And thus, it is incumbent

upon us to respond to this overwhelming good news journey of the Son of God.

- **An incredible future return:** But there is still one last event of the gospel that is yet to come. Our King Jesus not only reigns now as the King of all things, He also promised that He would come again to deliver us out of this world. It is in hope of His coming again, therefore, that we patiently endure the suffering of this world (Jn 14:1-3; 1 Jn 3:2).

The gospel events of the Son of God provide all the hope we need to endure a world of suffering and death.

- **An incredible road map to glory:** All of us who have obeyed the gospel are the church of those hopefuls who have submitted to Jesus as the King of kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tm 6:15). As the church, we are the reflection of our King to this present world. Unfortunately, because of the religious nature of those who do not know the Bible, there are millions of people throughout the world today who call themselves “Christian,” but have been deceived by Satan to take an alternate road away from the straight and narrow way (Mt 7:13,14). The road they have taken leads in the wrong direction. So we seek to encourage people of faith to venture into the word of God in order to restore² God’s definition of His people, and thus join together with us on our way into the eternal presence of the One who came out of heaven for us.

If one finds himself or herself being misguided by a man-made road map—or no road map at all—then it is our prayer that what follows in this document will somehow bring us closer together and on the same road to heaven. But most important, bring us all closer to God. Keep in mind that this book is not the road map. It is only an effort on our part to encourage and direct others to discover the identity of the original disciples

of Christ who responded to the message of the gospel in the first century. Our effort in this writing, therefore, is to focus first on the gospel journey of our Savior that is recorded in the Bible. We then seek to encourage others to restore believers as Christians who were identified in the first century by their belief in and response to the incarnational offering of the Son of God.

Deception is the work of Satan to divert as many people as possible away from the gospel journey of the Son of God. For this reason, it is imperative that we go into the Holy Spirit's Historical Record of the gospel in the Bible in order to restore today the fellowship of a grace-driven, gospel-oriented people of God who base their faith on the kingship and priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible must be our only road map to discover our way into the loving arms of God.

- **An incredible journey of pain:** Restoring today the original body of believers that was first established in the first century will not be easy. It will not be easy if we find ourselves comfortable in an existing religious fellowship that does not focus on the word of God. Continued compliance with the religious traditions of our fathers is often an effort to spare ourselves from any “spiritual” pain that we must endure in our journey back to the authority of the word of God. Nevertheless, if we are to restore our confidence in the gospel and reassure our faith, then we must go on this journey through the word of God. We must commit ourselves to restore the truth of the gospel,³ and thus, bring ourselves into fellowship with those disciples who were first called Christians in Antioch.

3 - When we use the phrase “truth of the gospel,” we do not mean a legal systematic code of biblical teachings. We use the phrase as Paul did in reference to the truth that Jesus was incarnate in the flesh of man, went to the cross, was bodily resurrected, ascended to heaven, and is now reigning as King of kings. All this is true, and thus, the truth of the gospel journey of the Son of God (Gl 2:5,14; Cl 1:5).

We must remember that there was usually no spiritual pain when we moved into creating after our own desires or religious traditions a fellowship of disciples that was pleasing to ourselves. There was no pain when we fell into the trap of meritorious⁴ performances of our traditional religiosity that we received from our fathers. But in order to back out of any established traditional religion,⁵ there will inevitably be conflict within our own minds, and possibly with those who have no desire to go on this restorational journey with us.

In making the journey out of traditional or experiential⁶ religion, we will better understand the misguided traditional religious paradigm into which the Son of God Himself came in the first century. Judaism was far removed from what God originally established at Mount Sinai. But because the Jews, by the time of Jesus, had created a religion after their own traditions, it was the right time in history for the Son of God to show up with some good news of freedom from religious bondage (See Mk 7:1-9).

• **An incredible road to discovery:** When we search the Scriptures, we are not surprised when we discover that there is sometimes a vast difference between what we see in the New Testament and the typical religious group that we witness today in the religious world of Christendom.⁷ Or at least, we find some things in our existing religious establishment that need immediate attention, especially those things that either ignore or marginalize the gospel. Therefore, if we do discover

4 - By "meritorious" we mean that one can keep a systematic code of laws, or good works, by which one can earn his or her salvation, or self-justify oneself before God through perfect law-keeping or meritorious good works.

5 - We use the word "religion" to refer to any legal order of rites, rituals or ceremonies that are imposed on the adherents of a particular church, which code of laws must be legally performed in order to deem one faithful to a particular religious group, and thus, justified before God.

6 - By experiential we mean religious behavior that is based on human emotions, and thus is subject to our feelings. This is opposed to objective faith that is based on the word of God (Rm 10:17).

7 - The word "Christendom" refers to the religious world of those who in some way believe in Jesus Christ. Within this realm of belief, however, there are those who are denominated from one another by their unique beliefs and traditional practices. Christendom, therefore, does not identify one as a Christian.

on our restorational journey anything in our present beliefs or behavior that is contrary to the word of God, then we all agree that there must be immediate repentance.

In our study of the Holy Spirit's History Book and Instructional Manual on beliefs and behavior—the Bible—we sometimes discover that the church we read about in the Scriptures is somewhat different than the “church” of which we are presently a member today. Nevertheless, if we seek to establish the word of God as the final authority in matters of faith, then our uneasiness about the difference between the church then and now compels us to take this restorational journey.

On our way back two thousand years, we cannot stop along the way at some man-made religious group that may have been the ingenious product of some misdirected religious person who knew little or nothing about the word of God. If we do this, in our deepest sincerity we might end up in some cult. Therefore, we must have the courage to go back all the way to the first century in order to discover again the sweet aroma of a Bible-based, gospel-driven fellowship of people to which the New Testament refers to as “Christians.”

Our sincerity, if not our honesty, is often tested by our willingness to either restore or reject what we discover in the Bible that conflict with our present beliefs and behavior.

Article 1

Christians Are Identified By Their Restorational Efforts⁸

Peter exhorted some wayward religionists with the words, *“Repent and be converted so that your sins may be blotted out, in order that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord”* (At 3:19).

• **Finding ourselves:** When we use the word “Christian,” different people have different reactions, or interpretations. If a particular group of “Christians” are networked together on the basis of a common man-made name, some system of common government, or identity by an order of assembly performances, then any member of one of these groups would conclude that their network of churches is the “one church.” Or, some might interpret the phrase “one church” to refer to a particular group that is unique in name, Sunday-morning ceremonies, and the autocratic control of a dynamic leader. Those who would make this definition of the “one church” would conclude that every assembly of adherents before the assigned leader reaffirms “their church” as standing alone in the midst of a world of differing churches that are denominated from one another because of the uniqueness of each group, or the autocratic leadership of one person.

• **The challenges of a religious world:** In our present religious world, the list of different religious groups—“churches”—goes on endlessly. Nevertheless, there is some truth scattered here and there throughout the present catalog of endless churches. Not everyone is wrong in everything, though this could be true of a cult.

The result of this endless religious confusion should produce at least one good motivation in the hearts of all gospel-living Bible lovers around the world. We should search for some Divinely inspired Dictionary,⁹ and then go to work to discover the gospel that gave rise to those who were just Christians in the first century. Only in God’s word is there any hope of discovering this gospel and the “one church” that is composed of Christians throughout the world. Therefore, it is only in this discovery that we truly identify those who would be “Christian.”

9 - We use the word “dictionary” metaphorically. In other words, the Bible must become the sole authority in defining all matters of faith. And when discussing the subject of “church,” the New Testament must define all the words that explain the church, as well as how the early disciples functioned as “church.”

• **A word of caution:** The first thing we should do in order to define a Christian is that we **read with caution** the existing definitions of the church in modern-day theological books. We should consult these books only if the purpose of the author was to guide our minds into an **expository study** of the New Testament in order to restore the church of the Bible. Studies in religion profit little, or nothing.

The “one church” of Christians cannot be identified by commonly accepted religious practices, legally¹⁰ defined systems of assembly or worship, or even common names that are scratched on the walls of different church buildings throughout the land. Sometimes the very walls that encompass “our church” have become a necessity in order to define that “our church” exists.

Such a system of identification of the church is commonly implanted in the hearts and minds of too many church-goers today. Too many people are still “going to church,” and subsequently feel that they have arrived at being “church” when they step inside four walls. Unfortunately, these “church goers” have forgotten that “church” is never defined in the New Testament as some system of assembled Christians. Neither is a pile of bricks, or arranged grass hut, a “church.” As the eunuch, one is a Christian, and thus “church,” as soon as he or she comes forth from the waters of baptism (At 8:26-40). **Being Christian is not something one can declare apart from doing that which Christ instructed us to do in response to the gospel** (See Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15; Jn 3:3).

The challenge we have in identifying the church of the New Testament is that our past and present religious traditions

¹⁰ - “Legal” is a term that is used in reference to law. A legalist is one who demands strict adherence to a code of laws, apart from grace, and thus through meritorious law-keeping one is supposedly self-justified before God. All religion exists on the foundation of a legal adherence to traditional beliefs or catechisms that must be obeyed.

are too often attached to our behavior as “the church,” and thus we study our Bibles with the prejudiced thinking of our present beliefs and behavior.

Jesus ran straight into the problem of misguided religiosity during His earthly ministry. Though His objective was different than ours, He was seeking to reveal the gospel that would be the foundation upon which His disciples would be established and defined after His death. But when He sought to call out truly Bible-oriented people from among the Jews, He ran straight into conflict with the religionists of the day who posed to have a sincere faith in God, but were held up in their religiosity by their religious traditions (See Mk 7:1-9). These tradition-oriented religionists eventually had Jesus nailed to a cross. Therefore, as Jesus, the radical restorationist today should expect no less from radical traditionalists who can be identified by the container of nails (traditions) in their hands just in case they spy out someone who is trying to “change” the church. What happened among the first century Christians also occurs today. Paul wrote a historical reference to this matter by direction of the Holy Spirit: *“But this happened because of false brethren secretly brought in, who sneaked in to spy out our liberty that we have in Christ Jesus, **that they might bring us into bondage**”* (Gl 2:4).

• **So simple that we miss the point:** In our search for Christians, we are reminded of Jesus’ promise to His disciples that **He would build His church** (Mt 16:18). Unfortunately, some of us have concluded that what He meant is too abstract—that is, so confusingly unclear—that there are no concrete identifying characteristics that would allow us to identify ourselves as Christians, and thus, “His church.” And probably most important in our case today is our challenge to restore something in reference to “church” that has been totally lost in a quagmire of confused and contradictory religious rituals, rites and cer-

emonies (See 2 Tm 4:3,4). Nevertheless, we must not lose heart in a world of religious confusion in which we now live. We must not conclude that we cannot discover the identity of gospel-responsive and gospel-driven disciples who would be known simply as Christians.

If church is NOT defined by a complex organizational structure, or an autocratic church leader on earth, or some legal system of assembly, then the answer to finding the “right church,” on being just “Christian,” may be more simple than we first thought.

As on the day of Pentecost with the 3,000, the Ethiopian eunuch was a Christian when he came out of the waters of baptism (See At 8:39,40). He was a member of the universal church, and a Christian, when he went on his way to Ethiopia rejoicing. He was “church” and “Christian” without all the ceremonies and traditions that we assume one must perform in order to be identified as “church” or “Christian.” Consequently, the church first existed in Ethiopia when the first gospel-obedient disciple—the eunuch—had his passport stamped on the Ethiopian side of the border. A Christian, and thus the church existed in Ethiopia before there was any Sunday morning performance of worship ceremonies. The church existed in Ethiopia with only one member.

Article 2

Christians are Identified As Courageous People¹¹

We have always thought it interesting that when Paul completed his confrontation with legalistic Judaizing teachers among the Roman disciples, he concluded his arguments for grace in Romans 8:28-39 with the euphoric declaration of courage that seems to be a doxology. In these concluding

¹¹ - RESEARCH: **Biblical Research Library**, Book 68: *Change For Growth*, Book 89: *Your Gospel Journey With The Son Of God*, www.roger-e-dickson.org

statements, he encouraged the grace-educated and grace-driven disciples among the Roman disciples with exhortations as “*we know that all things work together for good to those who love God*” (Rm 8:28). And, “*what will we then say to these things [concerning the revelation of the grace of God through the Son of God]? (Rm 8:31). “He who spared not His own Son . . . how will He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rm 8:32). “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rm 8:35). “But in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rm 8:37).*

In reference to the discussion that follows, and for those who are most sincere in their efforts to be Bible-believing and gospel-based disciples, Paul concluded his revelational doxology with the encouraging words of Romans 8:38,39 (Please read). It takes a great deal of courage to stand firm for grace in the midst of a religious world that is obsessed over either religious ceremonies or meritorious religious traditions that work against the grace of God.

- **True leaders and change:** A very profound historical statement was made by the Spirit-inspired Luke in Acts 6:7. It is a statement that is often casually read, and thus not fully appreciated. In the historical context in which Luke wrote the statement, he wanted us to gain courage from individuals who took a stand for Jesus. We believe that the Holy Spirit directed Luke to make this historical statement to encourage restorationists to carry on with restorations regardless of any opposition that may come from a religious world that has been led away from the God of love, which God did not spare His own Son in order to extend grace to the world. Therefore, we read with interest concerning the following courageous religious leaders in the first century who obeyed the gospel:

So the word of God increased. And the number of the disciples

multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

We must consider this statement when we assume that the time involved here was during the **five-year period** after the Pentecost of Acts 2. Some of the priests who obeyed the gospel during this period could certainly have included some of those early priests who were in the courtyard of the Temple five years before Luke made this statement. Some of these priests were certainly there when judgment was made by the high priest, and other religious leaders (the priests), to turn Jesus over to Pilate in order to have Him crucified. So in Luke's indirect statement of encouragement here, some of the voters (the priests) against Jesus during that trial were by the time Luke recorded the historical statement of Acts 6:7, disciples of the One whom they had earlier cried out to be crucified.

Little did those priests know during the trial of Jesus that the sacrificial crucifixion for which they cried out was all in the plan of God to save their own souls. Their repentance during the years after the crucifixion, therefore, was indeed a testimony to the fact that misguided religious leaders can change when they learn more gospel, especially when their souls are involved. These priests could change even though they were formerly caught up in the hysteria to crucify the One who revealed the love of God for them. The same is true today when religious leaders often first reject a better understanding of the gospel, but later understand in more detail what actually took place on Calvary over two thousand years ago (Compare Rm 1:13-16; 10:13-16).

- **Spiritually generating restoration and change:** In the context of the plea of what we are promoting in this book, this point is very important. When one begins to understand that “the church” that he or she is promoting is actually advocating

religious beliefs and behavior that are possibly far removed from the church about which we read in the New Testament, then things begin to happen in the hearts of sincere people, just as it did in the hearts of those priests about whom Luke wrote who obeyed the gospel. It is as the Pharisee Nicodemus, who, in the night, secretly came to Jesus (Jn 3:1,2). He realized that the twelve-year-old Nazarene carpenter's son with whom he and other Pharisees and priests had possibly encountered in the temple about eighteen years before was now working miraculous signs that proved that God was with Him (See Lk 2:41-52).

Nevertheless, at this time about eighteen years later, and after that Temple discussion with the twelve-year-old "boy Jesus," Nicodemus still did not have the courage to come to this "man" Jesus in the daylight hours during His earthly ministry. After the crucifixion, however, it seems that he himself was beginning to connect the dots between prophecy, fulfillment, miraculous signs, and that twelve-year-old boy with whom he possibly discussed in the Temple many years before profound matters concerning the law (See Jn 19:38,39).

In the early struggles of a restoration, one must often, in the quietness of his own home at night with the word of God, be challenged by the word of God concerning his personal beliefs, and thus determined with courage to carry on with the change of restoration regardless of all opposition.

When one is startled by the difference between the early church he or she reads about in the New Testament and the religious group to which one may be a member today, then one should be motivated to take ownership of the painful task of restoring the first century Christianity of the New Testament. It is then that one, if honest and moved by faith in the road map of the word of God, starts to take action to restore what is defined as a Christian by the New Testament.

• **Change often inspires opposition:** Taking action to restore that which has been forgotten will inevitably give rise to much opposition. Opposition will come from those who seek to continue what they believe to be the “old paths,” but actually are not old enough, that is, old enough to be traced back to the first century. We must not think that restoring our walk according to the authority of the word of God will be any different than what Jesus and the early Jewish Christians experienced when they left the Jews’ religion in order to be disciples of Christ. Those early disciples were confronted with the hostility of the Jewish leadership. Nevertheless, some priests in the Jewish leadership were as Nicodemus who later became an outspoken disciple of Jesus. They eventually accepted the fact that there was too much evidence that pointed to the fact that Jesus was actually sent from God.

Unfortunately, those who want to protect the old traditional ways, or possibly their own leadership positions “in the church,” will most assuredly rise up as they did against Jesus. After the cross, traditional Jewish leaders also rose up against the apostles (See At 4:17; 5:17-32). They stoned Stephen outside Jerusalem (At 7:54-60). Even Paul was stoned on one of his mission trips (At 13:50; 14:19).

Now reconsider the historical statement of Acts 6:7 in the context of this great opposition against the early disciples that resulted from their preaching the truth of the gospel.

When courageous leaders stand up against misguided religiosity, great things will happen. Necessary beliefs that are based on the word of God will stimulate change, or at least adjust our thinking to believe in a way that brings us more into alignment with the identity of the gospel-driven Christians that we read about in the New Testament.

• **Persistent opposition:** Every restorationist must understand that in order to restore the Christianity of the New Testament, **there will always be opposition.** People simply feel satisfied to remain within the confines of their own religious bondage. Being a member of the “church of their choice” brings a certain sense of reassurance. Such people will continually rise up in order to oppose any change in the established traditions of the fathers (Read At 13 – 14).

There is a sense of security in bondage: The first thing a long-time released prisoner wants, who initially stands free on the outside of a prison, is to turn around and walk right back into the bondage of the prison. By this time in his life he has become “institutionalized,” and thus finds it quite frightening to stand free outside prison walls. Prison bars give him a sense of security. It is the same with those who have for years lived behind the bars of religious traditions.¹²

Most people in the bondage of traditional churchianity¹³ find it too frightening to step outside the security of their traditional religiosity and trust only in the word of God as the final authority in all matters of faith.

We would assume that those who take a stand to bring people outside the prison walls of traditional or experiential religion will find it difficult to convince others that we must restore the authority of God’s word in all matters of faith. We must restore the gospel as the prime motivation to get us where God wants us to be. As a Christian, the gospel must be our spiritual center of reference in all matters of faith.

• **It takes courage to escape the bondage of religion:** We must never forget that religion brings us into the bondage of

12 - RESEARCH: **Biblical Research Library**, Book 49: *Escape From Bondage*, www.roger-e-dickson.org

13 - By “churchianity” we mean to encompass all those religious beliefs and behavior that religious people, in the expression of their faith, presume to be “the church” of the Bible, which beliefs and behavior have no authority as such in the Bible.

ourselves, and there is no freedom in bondage. After reconsidering who Jesus was, those priests about whom Luke wrote in Acts 6:7 found enough courage to finally believe that He was the Christ and Son of God. They finally had enough courage to take the plunge into Christ through the waters of baptism. They joined the host of those who would base their faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And certainly, they willingly joined with those about whom Peter about thirty years later wrote in 1 Peter 4:16: *“Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name.”*

Today, we can ask for no less from other religious leaders. We plead that they also follow the example of those Jewish priests about whom Luke wrote in Acts 6:7. One may initially come in the night to ask questions. However, the brave must eventually step forward in daylight hours, as Nicodemus eventually did, in order to reveal his or her loyalty to Jesus and His word (See Jn 19:38,39).

The struggle of the Christian is often against zealous religionists who have brought themselves into the bondage of their own religious heritage.

We would conclude with John's statement in Revelation 21:8:

But the cowardly and unbelieving and the abominable and murderers and immoral people and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, will have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

And Paul added, *“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might”* (Ep 4:10).

Article 3

Christians Are Identified As Gospel-Obedient People¹⁴

The original translators of the 1611 King James version did not necessarily help us when they were ambitious to insert the word “church” in their rendition of Acts 2:47. When the translators of this version tried to paint some identity of the “one church,” they inserted into the translated text of Acts 2:47 the English word “church,” possibly forgetting that everyone would read into the text all the religious baggage that was attached to the English word “church” that existed in the Church of England at the time. When the translators thus inserted the word “church” in the text, there came with it all the definitions of the Church of England. And frankly, people today do the same with all their traditional definitions of “church.” We have this unfortunate tendency to read into the Bible that which we have traditionally accepted as “church.”

But the Greek text of Acts 2:47 simply states that after the disciples’ obedience to the gospel that occurred on the A. D. 30 Pentecost, God continued to add newly baptized people thereafter to the number of disciples who were baptized in the name of Christ on that day and thereafter. However, the Greek word *ekklesia* (church) **is simply not in the text of Acts 2:47**. So the addition of the word to Acts 2:47 begs the question, Why did the 1611 translators add the English word “church” to Acts 2:47?

**Answering this question takes us on a challenging journey we must make as gospel-obedient Christians who seek to understand the simplicity of Christianity in view of all the churchi-
anity in which people have involved themselves today.**

In order to renew our understanding of this matter, we must return to the ministry of Jesus. We must read again Matthew 28:19 where Jesus, before His ascension, said to His immediate disciples, “*Going, therefore, **disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.***”

This is one text where the Greek word *mathatais* (disciple) is in its verb form. And thus, those who became Christians in the first century **were first disciplined to Christ**. These people made a determined effort to follow Christ.

Jesus then instructed that those who had been disciplined were to be baptized. So in the years before Luke’s historical statement of Acts 11:26, when the disciples were first called Christians, those who believed in Christ had been disciplined to Christ according to Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 28:19. Having been disciplined to Christ, they were then baptized into Christ. The unbelievers in Antioch simply identified those who followed Christ with the name “Christian.” They were thus Christians as the church of Christ because they were disciples of Christ who had been baptized in the name of Christ (See Rm 6:3-6).

• **Added to the free:** The first gospel-obedient disciples **were not** added to some legally defined institutional “church” of those who were in the bondage of their father’s religion. On the contrary, on that day of the A.D. 30 Pentecost there were no legally defined “churches” in existence to which one could be added. There existed no formalized systems of acting out some assembly to which the gospel-respondent disciples could knowingly participate, or any required Sunday morning performance that would identify them as “the church.” There were no designated pews in a church house on Main Street for them to occupy. They were simply baptized disciples of Christ in Jerusalem who were added to the fellowship of disciples thereafter.

We must not forget that Christians existed before there was any assembly of Christians.

All that the initial respondents to the gospel knew was that if they obeyed the gospel of King Jesus, and were baptized in the name of Christ, they would be set free, first from their sin of calling for the crucifixion of their Savior, but then also, they would receive the remission of all their past sins (At 2:38). They would consequently be set free from all religiosity by which they had previously presumed to justify themselves before God through perfect law-keeping, specifically the keeping the laws of the “Jews’ religion” (See Gl 1:13,14; compare Rm 10:1-3).

Therefore, Pentecost was indeed a day of independence. It was independence from the bondage of sin and the bondage of their religion of Judaism that they had constructed throughout the years as a means to justify themselves before God, which thing the truly sincere Jews as the apostles knew was totally impossible (Compare Gl 2:16).

• **The simple gospel produces simple Christians:** On that day of Pentecost when about 3,000 responded to the good news of the resurrected, ascended and reigning Savior, all the information concerning “the church” that we read about throughout the New Testament **had not yet been delivered to the early Christians by the apostles**. What the people heard on that day was the simple gospel of the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and kingdom reign of Jesus. What the people did in response to Peter’s announcement of these historical events was what he instructed them to do (At 2:38). **Church was no more complicated than an *ekklesia* (assembly) of about 3,000 people who were baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit on that day.** Church was the collective assembly of those who had been discipled into

Christ, and subsequently baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (See Mt 28:19,20; Rm 6:3-6).

By adding the word “church” to Acts 2:47, with all its “Church of England baggage,” the 1611 translators were simply too eager to get on with their introduction of the “church,” though they were not wrong in their conclusion concerning the beginning of the church of Christ on the A.D. 30 Pentecost. But their definition of “church,” and our understanding of the church of gospel-obedient disciples that is further defined in the rest of the New Testament, is very different. The people on Pentecost did not respond to the preaching of a “church religion,” **but to a resurrected, ascended and reigning Christ.**

- **Continued teaching:** Now we must mention here a common misunderstanding of what Luke recorded in Acts 2:40 & 42. Notice carefully what Luke recorded in Acts 2:40: “*And with many other words he [Peter] testified and exhorted.*” “Testified” was not about church, **but about what the apostles experienced in their association with Jesus throughout His ministry** (See Jn 20:31,32). “Exhortation” would naturally follow Peter’s testimony of what the apostles personally saw and experienced when they were with Jesus. Peter surely recalled his personal experience with Moses and Elijah when he, with James and John, were on the mountain with Jesus (See Mt 17:1-13; 2 Pt 1:18). Therefore, Peter exhorted the people to believe and be encouraged by the apostles’ personal experiences with Jesus that transpired throughout the three and a half years they were personally with Him.

Acts 2:42 is Luke’s historical explanation of what followed in the succeeding days, weeks and months after the day of Pentecost. The day of Pentecost was only the beginning of Peter’s personal testimony, for the rest of the apostles throughout the remainder of their lives continued to give testimonies

of their personal experiences with Jesus during His earthly ministry (See 1 Pt 1:3; 2 Pt 1:16-18). Throughout the rest of their lives they continued to reveal to gospel-obedient Christians all those things that Jesus had promised them during His earthly ministry when the Holy Spirit would be sent to them (Jn 14:26; 16:13,14).

This teaching concerning matters of instruction began on Pentecost, but also continued **after** the day of Pentecost. The first respondents to Peter's message on Pentecost knew only that the Jesus whom they had crucified was resurrected, and now reigning in heaven (At 2:22-26). It was to this gospel message that the people responded. We emphasize this point in order to understand that the 3,000 **did not** respond to a preached catechism of the "right church." They responded to a simple gospel message of the resurrection, ascension and kingdom reign of Jesus, whom they had crucified. Their response in baptism thus revealed that through their gospel obedience Jesus commenced His church of disciples. "Church" can be no more complicated than this. A Christian, therefore, is simply one who has responded in baptism to the crucified and reigning King Jesus (See 1 Co 15:1-4).

If we are "Christian" simply because of what we believe and our good works, then we would deny the necessity of the incarnation of the Son of God. If we were saved on the merit of our good works, then the Son of God could have simply stayed in heaven, revealed more information through inspired prophets, and then allowed our conscience to move us to do good works in order to atone for our sins. No incarnation and cross on the part of the Son of God would have been necessary. No one would need to make a demonstrated statement of commitment in baptism in obedience to a death, burial and resurrection of the Son of God (See Rm 6:3-6). We would simply have saved ourselves through meritorious good works,

taking our chances that God would overlook all our sins on the basis of our sincerity.

As the 3,000 were being added on Pentecost, the newly baptized additions could not scramble to the New Testament documents for learning more revealed information from God. They could not because **these documents were not yet in existence**. The writing of the first New Testament documents began **about twenty years after the Pentecost of A. D. 30**. On the Pentecost of Acts 2, therefore, there was only Peter, John, and the other apostles. The apostles only had the information the people needed to know at the time (Jn 14:26; 16:13,14). They were on that day the “verbal” New Testament. But after the revelation and action of the gospel atonement of the Son of God, there was all the impetus in that reality to be obedient to what the apostles said, and later wrote. Everything had changed since the days of the Old Testament prophets.

- **The “number”:** The word “number” that is mentioned in Acts 2:47 would find its antecedent first in the apostles who were speaking on that day. Since verse 47 is a historical statement of Luke of what happened on Pentecost and thereafter, continued additions to the 3,000 were counted in “their number” as each gospel-responsive disciple came out of the waters of baptism. We could also possibly go back and include the 120 in chapter 1 who were on Pentecost rebaptized in the name of Christ on that day (At 1:15). Regardless of who were included in the original “number” in Acts 2:47, we know that “their number” in Acts 2:47 is the church of gospel-obedient disciples, which number continued to grow as others obeyed the gospel thereafter.

Since church is people, then we must never forget that when God adds to the church, people are being added to a fellowship of people.

• **John's baptism for remission of sins:** Because there was initially on Pentecost the twelve, and the rest who were added, then we would conclude that there was not something abstract about "their number" to whom gospel-obedient disciples were added on and after Pentecost. **We must not forget that those of "their number" were not there because they had previously responded to the gospel, and thus baptized in the name of Christ.** On the contrary, "their number," if we include the rebaptized 120 and the apostles, had previously only believed that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God. **They had only been discipled to Christ before Pentecost.** Those who had been baptized before Pentecost had been initially baptized for remission of sins with John's baptism. However, they had not been baptized in response to the resurrected, ascended and reigning Jesus Christ, **for the gospel of the death, burial, resurrection, ascension and reign of Jesus had not yet taken place when they initially believed and were baptized for remission of their sins unto John's baptism** (Compare Mt 3:13-15; Mk 1:4). In fact, we would conclude that the apostles had no idea that Jesus was reigning as King of kings about a week before Pentecost. They only knew when the Holy Spirit came upon them in Acts 2:1-4. It was only then that the Holy Spirit revealed all truth (See Jn 14:26; 16:13,14). Therefore, none of the people who were baptized unto repentance for remission of sins after John's baptism **were baptized in the name of Christ.** Making a demonstrated statement in baptism in the name of Christ only came after Peter's announcement in Acts 2:38. It was only on Pentecost when the church of Christ came into existence when people were first baptized in the name of Christ.

By the time of Peter's announcement of the whole gospel on the day of Pentecost, many had already believed and were baptized unto John's baptism. They were baptized before Pentecost because they believed that John was a prophet sent

from God in preparation for the One in whom they must later believe was the Christ (Messiah) and Son of God. And since they believed John to be a prophet of God, they concluded that his baptism for remission of sins was a message from God. John subsequently encouraged his disciples to follow Christ (See Jn 3:25-36). And certainly, John's baptism was in prospect for remission of sins because those who trusted in his message were baptized in view of the coming gospel event of the cross (See At 17:30; Rm 3:25).

- **The rebaptism:** We are not told whether the apostles and the 120 were rebaptized on Pentecost. We only assume that they were. The Holy Spirit, possibly, did not consider this important information for us to know in reference to those who were baptized on that day. Therefore, He did not inspire Luke to make any specific historical statements of their possible **rebaptism in the name of Jesus Christ** (At 2:38). The Spirit possibly trusted that we would assume that they were rebaptized because they wanted to be known for being baptized **in the name of Christ**. At least we know that when some disciples were later found by Paul in Ephesus who having been baptized only into John's baptism, **they were subsequently rebaptized in the name of Christ** (At 19:1-7). It is for his reason that we assume that the apostles and the 120 disciples were rebaptized, possibly on the Pentecost of Acts 2.

We must conclude, therefore, that some of those included in the "number" in Acts 2:47 were there on Pentecost because they had believed before Pentecost that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ and Son of God, as well as John the Baptist being a prophet of God (See Mt 16:16-18). Because the message of the wondrous works of Jesus had been broadcast throughout the Roman Empire **before** Pentecost, these "believers" had come to this Pentecost in order to find answers for their many questions concerning Jesus whom the Jewish leaders had called

for the crucifixion about forty-nine days before Pentecost (See At 2:5-12). Many of these people had possibly been baptized unto John's baptism, and thus were considered with the 3,000 when they responded to Peter's gospel message that everyone must now be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- **A unique fellowship of believers:** Because there were religious Jews from throughout the Roman Empire present on Pentecost, the statement, "their number" in Acts 2:47 was in some way identifiable as **a specific group** of those who initially believed that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God, and were baptized in the name of Christ. We must keep in mind, however, that many of these had previously been baptized for the remission of sins with John's baptism. We thus assume that the "number" of people who had previously been baptized for remission of sins with John's baptism was significant. Such baptisms happening as far away as Ephesus in Asia Minor (At 19:1-7) and Alexandria in North Africa (At 18:24,25).

We must consider this point because during the short six-month ministry of John, Mark recorded that John preached "*baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*" (Mk 1:4). As a result, "*there went out to him*" a **great number** of people in Judea, and they "*were all baptized by him*" (Mk 1:5). We might consider including in the 3,000 who were baptized on Pentecost all those who had previously been baptized with John's baptism (See Jn 4:1,2). When we add together all these disciples, we begin to understand why there were about 3,000 people baptized in the name of Christ on Pentecost.

We must not forget that between Passover and Pentecost there were fifty days, Pentecost being the fiftieth day after Passover. Therefore, there was sufficient time during the days between Passover and Pentecost for word of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection to be proclaimed throughout Judea (See 1 Co

15:1-11). All those who heard this message surely scurried to Jerusalem to hear more about the crucifixion and resurrection of the One they had heard to be the Christ. This would especially be true since Jesus appeared to over five hundred people **after** His resurrection. Paul referred to this “five hundred” as “brethren” (1 Co 15:6; see Rm 9:3). We would assume that this appearing took place before the ascension, thus answering why there were so many baptized (or rebaptized) on Pentecost. Through the appearances, Jesus was establishing evidence of His resurrection before the announcement of His ascension to the right hand of God and established kingdom reign that took place before the A.D. Pentecost. For the “five hundred,” Peter simply announced that the One who appeared to them was now reigning in heaven. They thus had the opportunity on Pentecost of moving from being Jewish “brethren,” to being “brethren” in Christ by their obedience to the gospel.

In conjunction with those who had heard the gospel for the first time on Pentecost, Peter instructed those of the repentant audience of Jewish unbelievers on that day that there was now a **new name** into which one must be baptized. There was a new name because there was a new King in heaven. The name of the new King who had ascended, and was now reigning, was the Lord Jesus Christ. For this Jewish audience, this part of the gospel was what they needed to hear (At 2:36-38). We could assume, therefore, that all of John’s disciples were baptized again in the name of this new King, **for He was not yet King of kings at the time of their initial baptism during the ministry of both John and Jesus**. At this time, and in order to reveal their subjection to the new King, they needed to be baptized **in the name of their new King**, who was now the resurrected, ascended and reigning Lord Jesus Christ.

When those who believe knowingly obey the gospel in the name of Christ, then they are validated to be call “Christians.”

Article 4

Christians Are Identified By A Specific Beginning

Something in what the 3,000 believed and did on the Pentecost of A.D. 30 separated them from all other Jews who were present on that day. Therefore, we would conclude first that the first Christian in history **can be identified simply as one who believed in the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, His resurrection, His ascension, kingdom reign, and his or her response to these historical events by obedience to the gospel in baptism** (At 2:38).

However, thirty-three years earlier, at the very beginning when an angel announced to shepherds, *“For to you a Savior is born this day in the city of David,”* world history was about to go through a paradigm shift (Lk 2:11). The paradigm started to shift when there came *“the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord’”* (Mk 1:3). This change all started with the coming of John the Baptist. But it was on and after the Pentecost of A.D. 30 when people were for the first time in history baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. It was then that Christians were identified as such. And since then, the world has never been the same.

Christians are identified when people believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ (Messiah) and Son of God, and subsequently respond by baptism in His name for the remission of their sins. Being a Christian is no more complicated than this.

So we can first do away with all these favorite church names, legal systems of assembly, and organizational structures of those who would canonize some outlined catechism by which the church of Christians should be identified as a “religious organization.” None of these things existed on the Pentecost of Acts 2 when God started adding baptized disciples to “their number” in Acts 2:47.

“Their number” was eventually referred to as the *ekklesia* (church), but that reference only came later. Strictly adhering to Luke’s historical account of the matter in his document to Theophilus, “their number” on Pentecost was composed of all those who believed that Jesus of Nazareth had been resurrected, had ascended to sit on David’s throne, and then assigned a kingdom. All this was prophesied by the prophets (Dn 2:44; 7:13,14). It was just as Peter proclaimed (At 2:22-36). And when people first responded to these gospel events, church, the *ekklesia* of Christ, commenced.

The people of God were present on the day of Pentecost, first because there were there those who had already fulfilled “all righteousness” by being baptized with John’s baptism (Mt 3:16). However, they had not been baptized in the name of Christ. We would assume that those who had been baptized with John’s baptism were also baptized in the name of Christ on Pentecost. However, they **were not** Christians before they were baptized in the name of Christ. They were only present on the day of Pentecost as disciples of John and Jesus, and were subsequently considered to be of “their number” only after they had followed the instructions of Acts 2:38, which thing they surely did (At 2:41). The church of Christ, therefore, did not exist before the Pentecost of A.D. 30, for no one had yet been baptized into the name of Christ.

When that first individual on Pentecost was baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, it was then that the first Christian existed, and the church of Christ came into existence.

• **Christians only:** One can be a Christian, and thus a member of the “one church” today by simply obeying the gospel (baptism) in the name of Christ as the 3,000 did on Pentecost (See Rm 6:3-6; Gl 3:27). This is not a complicated subject to understand in reference to the *ekklesia*. We simply need to

keep our historical facts correct when considering “believers” who transitioned from the time of John and Jesus’ ministry before the Acts 2 Pentecost, and their existence as the *ekklesia* of Christ to which gospel-obedient believers were added on and after Pentecost.

The first Christian came into existence when the first person on earth obeyed the gospel by being baptized in the name of Christ. It was at this time that the church of Christ came into existence.

• **The name of Christ is inherently exclusive:** Baptism in the name of Christ was what separated Christians from the rest of the religious people who were present on Pentecost. The church of obedient believers was separated in the mind of God because of the members’ belief and obedient response to Jesus as their new King who was now reigning in heaven. Those who believed this on Pentecost, and subsequently assigned their allegiance with Christ by being baptized in His name, were eventually called Christians many years later in Antioch of Syria (At 11:26).

Gospel-obedient believers on Pentecost were considered to be a separate body of people from the rest of the religious Jews who were present on that day who had previously rejected and crucified Jesus. The unbelievers continued to reject Jesus who was at that time the fulfillment of all prophecy in reference to the Messiah, and thus, was reigning as King on David’s throne. Contrary to this group of persistent unbelievers, and after the revelation of the gospel reign of King Jesus by Peter, objective and sincere people on that day were cut to the heart. They believed that the rejected and crucified Jesus was now truly “*both Lord and Christ*” (At 2:36). Their belief in these facts in reference to Jesus of Nazareth, and response to the facts by baptism into His name, identified them as the disciples of Christ. Everyone else was excluded from “that number,” and thus considered unbelievers.

The resurrection and kingdom reign of the Lord Jesus at the time was a reality when Peter preached (At 2:14-36). This was the reality that moved about 3,000 people to responded with the inquiry, *“Men and brethren, what will we do?”* (At 2:37). In answer to this inquiry, there were directions given and obedience required in order to be identified with the reigning King: *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ,”* Peter mandated (At 2:38). Baptism in the name of Christ subsequently replaced the baptism of John.

The church of Christ began when people first responded in belief and baptism to the first official announcement that the Christ, who had been crucified, was now reigning as King over His kingdom.

• **First gospel, then Christians, and subsequently, church:** Emphasizing church over gospel is sometimes emphasized today by those who go forth and preach “church” (that is, their legal definition of organized “church”) instead of first preaching the gospel. We must not forget that it was the gospel resurrection, ascension and kingdom reign of Jesus that inspired a response to Christ on Pentecost. If the “church-preachers” would take another look at Peter’s message on Pentecost, they would discover that Peter preached gospel, not themselves as some organized legal church of people. Peter and the apostles did not preach themselves as “church,” and then encourage people to join their church as a personal choice.

It is incumbent on us that we preach the same message as Peter and the apostles did on Pentecost. We must first preach gospel. Church will naturally follow when repentant believers respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The order is Christ (gospel), then Christian, and thus the fellowship of Christians, the church.

The 1611 translators’ addition of the word “church” to the text of Acts 2:47 would find some justification on the basis

of what actually happened on Pentecost. The church began when people first responded to the resurrected and reigning “*Jesus whom you crucified.*” However, in order to caution against what the Holy Spirit knew would eventually happen in the years to come, the Spirit certainly did not have in mind all the baggage of what is now attached to the word “church.” Therefore, we must contend for the simplicity of the *ekklesia* of Christ as it was on the first day of its existence. “Church” in its most simple understanding is the fellowship of Christ-obedient disciples who believe that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God, and presently reigning as King. Their collective obedient response to these truths is what constitutes them as church.

Church exists because of gospel-obedient disciples of Christ, as opposed to a constitutional¹⁵ order of laws that are legally and meritoriously obeyed.

It might aid our understanding of gospel-respondent Christians as the church by better understanding how Jesus used the word *ekklesia* (church) in Matthew 16:18. Unfortunately, this may be difficult because some obsess over a legal identity of the church. On the other hand, Jesus was looking forward to a time when His disciples would be built on Him as the incarnate and resurrected Son of God. What the Holy Spirit knew would happen eventually did happen in reference to this point a few decades after Acts 2, especially among the disciples of Galatia. Some started preaching “another gospel” than what Peter and the apostles originally preached on Pentecost. They did so by adding other laws, as circumcision, to the simple gospel (See At 15:1,2). It subsequently took the Holy Spirit an entire let-

¹⁵ - We use the word “constitution” according to how the word is used in secular government. This would be a code of laws that are determined by men by which a government must function. A law-enforcement agency is established in order to check those who do not behave according to the laws of the constitution. Thus “law-breakers” are identified and brought before the courts. This is how the religion of Judaism functioned, with the Pharisees being the “police” of the system, and the high priest as the highest court of Judaism. Jesus was apprehended and brought before this high court of Judaism and condemned. The same happens today with “constitutionally defined churches.”

ter through the apostle Paul to deliver the disciples out of this “other gospel” of constitutional religiosity in order to again set them free from the bondage of religion (Gl 5:1).

When more instructions came to the disciples through the apostles in the weeks, months and years that followed Pentecost (At 2:42), we can better identify this group of people to whom the 3,000 were added daily by God on and after Pentecost. At least in Luke’s historical record of these people, the Holy Spirit did not use the word *ekklesia* to identify disciples as Christians until Acts 5:11, historically about five years after Pentecost. Luke simply assumed that Theophilus, the one to whom he wrote the document of Acts, would conclude that the fellowship of the “church” began on Pentecost. The disciples had continued until He wrote the history of the early church about thirty years later as the book of Acts. There was certainly a reason why the Holy Spirit did this. We can leave the “why” to the desecration of individual interpreters of the historical events. Though the word *ekklesia* is not used in the text of Acts 2:47, we simply conclude that this was when and where it all began. The 1611 translators wanted to help their readers along with this understanding as to when the church of Jesus’ disciples began to be the *ekklesia* of Christ.

When we identify that baptized believers were added “to them,” then we can only conclude that the pronoun “them” in Acts 2:47 refers to people, to disciples of Christ, and not to a constitutional organization of codified laws to which a membership of disciples must adhered to be “church.”

- **Searching for concrete answers:** As we study through the New Testament documents, we discover concrete answers that help us identify “the church” that Jesus said He would build on the basis of people believing (Christians) that He was the Christ and Son of the God (Mt 16:18,19). Since we must assume that there are concrete answers, then we must find them,

not among our misguided religious traditions, but in the Holy Spirit inspired documents of the New Testament.

When Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth, then we must assume that the New Testament Scriptures can be our only source of instruction to which we can go in order to discover the “one church” that Jesus said He would build, which church indeed began on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 (See Jn 14:26; 16:13,14). Therefore, we need to look for some concrete teaching on church in the New Testament lest we frustrate ourselves with so much confused “churchianity” that now prevails in the religious world of today.

Once sincere people understand that God is not pleased with division among those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, then they seek to find answers that will establish unity among all believers that is based on the fact that Jesus is the resurrected and reigning Christ.

Article 5

Christians Are Identified As Grace-motivated People¹⁶

Everyone who identifies themselves as a Christian does so on the bases of their faith and obedience to what they believe. Unfortunately, sometimes one's faith is more in what he or she establishes and behaves according to his or her limited understanding of the New Testament on this matter. Consequently, it is believed that being a Christian often depends on one's own performance of legal matters, than in the faith of Christ who went to the cross to make us righteous (“Christian”) on the foundation of who He was. Because of this belief and behavior, the subject of identifying a Christian because of one's response to the grace of God is certainly worthy of

consideration. We must be continually challenged, therefore, to study diligently these matters in the only “Dictionary” we have in order to define who is truly a Christian.

- **Entangled in bondage:** Some people seek to identify themselves as Christian by pointing out an array of legalities that they have obeyed and traditions that they have honored in respect of their fathers. In other words, some seek to go back under a system of legal obedience similar to the Jews under the Sinai law in order to construct a faith that can be constitutionally identified by either a specific name, institutional legal structure, or some ceremonial laws of assembly they faithfully observe. If there is an inadvertent violation of one of these “laws of the church constitution,” then he or she is brought before “church officials” (“Pharisees”) and possibly disfellowship from the “constitutional church.” But this is not that to which the Holy Spirit referred in 2 John 9,10:

*Whoever goes ahead and does not abide in **the teaching of Christ**, does not have God. He who abides in **the teaching of Christ**, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house and do not give him greeting.*

The “teaching of Christ” refers to **Christ**, not to a systematic theology of legal mandates to which one must conform perfectly in order to stand as a “Christian” before God. If performances of law were the subject of John’s statement, then none of us could abide in the “teaching of Christ,” for we are all sinners (Rm 3:23). The reference “teaching of Christ,” therefore, is to **gospel**, not law, for if it were to law, then no one could legally obey perfectly the “teaching of Christ.”

But if one rejects any part of the gospel of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and kingdom reign of

Christ, and a response thereto, then he or she has gone beyond the gospel—the teaching of Christ—which very thing was happening with the teaching of the Gnostics at the time John wrote the thoughts of 2 John 9,10. The Gnostics were teaching something similar to what Paul identified as “another gospel” (Gl 1:6-9). Some were teaching parts of the gospel, but adding other statutes of obedience that must also be performed.

The Gnostics were rejecting specifically the incarnation. In the Galatian context of Galatians 1:6-9 some Jewish Christians were adding other requirements for salvation in order to supplement the gospel. In doing such, they too were going beyond the gospel of grace by teaching requirements for our salvation other than the “teaching of Christ.” They had forgotten that adding to and subtracting from the message of the gospel means that one has gone beyond the gospel (See Rv 22:18,19).

Teaching the “teaching of Christ” means that in all matters of faith, the word of God is the source from which we learn the gospel. On the foundation of gospel, therefore, we understand and live the gospel. It is our response to this gospel that inspires us to continue our search in the word of God as to how we should live in response to grace. We are saved by our obedience to the gospel of grace, but it is our continued response to the instructions of God that moves us to live the obedient life (See Js 2:14-26).

If we believe and behave in a way that brings into question the gospel of God’s grace, then we are ignoring some fundamental truths that are revealed in the New Testament. These truths were revealed when the Holy Spirit addressed the dysfunctional behavior and beliefs of some early disciples, especially Jewish disciples who sought to bring into the fellowship of Christians the behavioral principles and legal structures of Judaism.

Some of the Jewish Christians also sought to go back under the bondage of the constitutional law-keeping of the Sinai law in order to be the church of God's people about whom it was written, ***"for by grace you are saved through faith"*** (Ep 2:10). They needed to be reminded of what Paul wrote in reference to Abraham: ***"For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something about which to boast, but not before God."***

Those who sought to walk by meritorious law-keeping in the early church failed to understand the grace to which Christians initially responded, and by which they behaved. And so, they walked directly into the Holy Spirit's defense of those who had been set free by grace from the bondage of meritorious and constitutional law-keeping. The Holy Spirit subsequently warned those who were being influenced by these law-keepers: ***"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage"***¹⁷ (Gl 5:1). This bondage in the Galatian letter was not in reference to sin, but a direct reference to meritorious law-keeping and supposed self-righteous atonement through good works.

Christians should be cautious about establishing a constitutional identity of being a Christian, lest they fall back into the bondage of meritorious law-keeping as some Jewish Christians in the first century (See Ep 2:8-10).

- **Freed by grace:** In seeking to walk in the bondage of perfect law-keeping and meritorious good works, one of the basic fundamentals that identifies one as a Christian is violated. Constitutional "churchiologists"¹⁸ often ignore the nature of being a Christian that is revealed in Romans 6:14: ***"For you are not under law, but under grace."*** In other words, Chris-

¹⁷ - The Holy Spirit used the word "bondage" in this text to refer to one going back into a system of trying to keep any law or religious tradition perfectly in order to self-justify oneself before God. Attempting to do such marginalized the justification that Jesus provided for us at the cross.

¹⁸ - These would be those who preach the legal definition of their religious group, as opposed to those who preach the gospel that brings unity between all those who believe in Jesus. Constitutional religion becomes legalistic, and then the adherents become judges of one another.

tians are not under any system of law that they are obligated to keep perfectly in order to justify themselves before God, and thus, be constitutionally identified as disciples of Jesus. **The fact is that there is no system of law that we could keep perfectly in order to justify ourselves before God.** This is true simply because all of us in some way or another break some of the laws of our man-organized constitution that is based on proof texts under every statute. Our constitution may have been fabricated as the prophet of God stated: *“But the word of the LORD was to them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little and there a little; so that they might go and fall backward and be broken and snared and taken”* (Is 28:13; see Rm 3:23).

We must remember, therefore, that when we fail to keep law perfectly—and we always fail—we can thank God that we are under grace, not a system that demands flawless obedience to statute upon statute, precept upon precept.

We must confess that those who have for years moved the identity of being a disciple of Jesus into a violation of the principle of Romans 6:14, find it quite difficult to understand what the Spirit meant in this statement. So we must dig deeper.

- **Avoiding religious bondage:**¹⁹ **Christians are not under the bondage of a legal system of meritorious law-keeping that they would perform in order to supposedly justify themselves before God.** It is simply self-deception, if not arrogant self-righteousness, to supposed that one can keep any system of law perfectly in order to be self-justified before God. This is true because we as Christians are identified by our response to the gospel of Christ, not through our perfect behavior in keeping a system of law.

It is certainly self-righteous thinking to assume before God that we are supposedly saved on the basis of a self-proclaimed perfect obedience to some “church law,” or meritorious good behavior. If this were possible, then Abraham would have somewhat about which to boast (Rm 4:2). **We must not forget that it is Christ who saves, not His church. The church is the saved, not the Savior.** Therefore, no matter how many “church laws” we may fabricate to obey, or good works we may collectively perform as the church, each member still stands accountable before God on the basis of God’s grace. Atone-ment for sin is in the cross, not in our performance of law.

If it were possible to establish some legal system of self-justification—and it is not—then we could pick and choose an assortment of doctrinal points in the New Testament in order to construct some legal definition of the church. We could then, in practice of this legal system of identity, claim that we have restored the “true church.” This is exactly what some Jewish Christians in Galatia were trying to do by intimidating others, specifically Gentile Christians, into going back under the bondage of salvational law-keeping of “statute upon statute and precept upon precept.” According to the Holy Spirit, they were being drawn away into “*another gospel*” (See Gl 1:6-9). They were going back into bondage.

The “other gospel” is the simple gospel of God’s grace through Jesus, plus numerous added catechisms and codes by which we would seek to meritoriously justify ourselves before God through perfect law-keeping.

- **Bondage builders:** Some have gone so far as to extract favorite “proof texts” out of a biblical context in order to establish some legal system of obedience to which all adherents of a particular sect must adhere in order to be identified as faithful members of the body of disciples. In other words, there are groups that believe in the gospel of God’s grace

through Jesus, but they have also added their own meritorious religious rites, ceremonies or traditions that must also be obeyed in order to be considered faithful Christians. Or, they have used the Scriptures to establish a constitutional legal system to identify the church to which they must conform in order to be faithful. If any of the constitutional laws are violated in this system of religion, then the violators must be judged to be unfaithful, or a weak member. Did not James say something about this in the following statement? *“There is one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy. **Who are you to judge another?**”* (Js 4:12).

Again, this is precisely what some legal-oriented Jewish Christians were doing in Galatia. In being self-appointed judges, they were walking contrary to the Holy Spirit’s mandate of Galatians 5:1, as well as revealing that they did not appreciate the principle of Romans 6:14. It was in this context that the Spirit reprimanded the Galatians: *“**I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from Him who called you into the grace of Christ to another gospel**”* (Gl 1:6).

Notice carefully that Paul said they were *“turning away **from Him** [Jesus].”* They were not turning away from some “sound doctrine.” They were turning away from Jesus by turning to themselves and their attempted self-justification through their personal performance of law. And since they were “turning” so soon after they had responded to the gospel, then we must never take this matter lightly.

It is easy to turn from grace to self-justification in reference to the performance of law. Legalistic law-keeping appeals to our sense of self-righteousness, especially when we think that we have kept all the laws perfectly.

By encouraging those who were faithful to Christ, Paul con-

tinued to rebuke the Galatian law-performers by stating that “*there are some who are **disturbing** you and want **to pervert the gospel of Christ***” (Gl 1:7). They were perverting the gospel of Christ through a legal system of law-keeping by which they supposedly thought to justify themselves. In this way, some Jewish Christians were taking the Gentile disciples back into the bondage of trying to keep some system of law perfectly in order to be identified before God as His people. Unfortunately, this legal attempt of self-justification, apart from the gospel of God’s grace, was a perversion of the gospel of Christ, which gospel sets us free from the necessity of perfect law-keeping and meritorious “righteous living” in order to be saved (Gl 5:1). Promoting such a marginalization of the gospel should “disturb” those who understand that we have been set free by grace.

In our search for an identity of Christians in the New Testament, we must be very cautious not to violate the very principle of Paul’s definition of the “other gospel” in the document of Galatians.

Good works must never be the sole identity of a Christian, for there are many religious people of the world who do a great deal of good works, but at the same time, they have no faith that Jesus is the Christ and incarnate Son of God.

• **Spoiled by vain philosophies:** The problem with a legal identity of a Christian through the practice of religious traditions, or a codified system of (constitutional) law, was not only a problem among the Galatian disciples. It was also a problem in Colossi and in many other areas where there was a concentration of Christians, especially Jewish Christians. In reference to this prevailing problem among the first converts, Paul sternly admonished the predominately Gentile disciples in Colossi, as well as others, with the following exhortation:

*Beware lest anyone **take you captive** through philosophy and vain deceit **according to the tradition of men**, according to the elementary principles of the world, **and not according to Christ** (Cl 2:8).*

Paul had to remind the Gentile disciples in Colossi, “**You are complete in Him** [Jesus]” (Cl 2:10). We must never forget where “completeness” lies. It lies in Christ, not in our supposed “complete” personal obedience to a codified system of law whereby we would presume to have “completely” (perfectly) obeyed in order to be self-justified before God. We simply must never forget that the more emphasis we place on our personal self-righteous performance of any law, **the further we move ourselves away from Christ**. And that was the problem among the disciples of Colossi.

The Colossians’ addition of religious rites, ceremonies and human philosophies could add nothing to the righteousness by which they were made righteous through the faith of Jesus Christ in going to the cross on their behalf. In fact, if one would presume that his perfect obedience to some system of law, or an attempted atonement of sin through good works, would justify oneself before God, **then he or she has cut himself or herself off from Christ**. If one would think to complete his or her righteousness before God through the performance of law or doing good works, then he or she has fallen from grace (See Gl 5:4). One has subsequently perverted the gospel of Jesus Christ (Gl 1:7). It is this problem among the early Christians that “disturbed” Paul. It is a persistent problem today in the religious world that should likewise disturb us.

Our keeping of a legal system of law cannot take the place of, or be a substitute for, the righteousness that we have received from God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Article 6

Christians Are Identified By Faith In The Faith Of Jesus²⁰

The church is identified as a fellowship of people who have faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who is now the King of kings (1 Tm 6:15). Christians are identified as those who have faith in Jesus' faith to have done all that was necessary in order to bring us into fellowship with God. This is the message to which people initially responded in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost. Therefore, any "name only" definition of one being a Christian is contrary to this initial gospel response of the first Christians.

We must not forget that the 3,000 responded to grace through Christ, not to some constitutional law to which repentant believers must conform perfectly in order to be saved. Any strict legal identity of the church, therefore, violates the very heart of the principle of Romans 6:14, and the foundation upon which the first Christians were originally established.

Since the church was originally established on the foundation of a message of gospel grace that was showered upon mankind from the throne of King Jesus in heaven, we must not conclude that our faith was then moved to a foundation of law that the first members successfully performed the following Sunday morning after the Pentecost Sunday of Acts 2. On the contrary, the foundation of the church of Christians has never moved from grace to self-righteousness through law-keeping, though there are instructions to be obeyed, especially in the area of moral behavior.

We must never forget that the church was church before the first Sunday morning after the Pentecost Sunday of

Acts 2. The fact is that we cannot establish ourselves as “Christian” on a supposed inerrant obedience to any system of law. This principle could not have been made more clear than when Paul publicly rebuked an individual Christian, the apostle Peter, with the following statement:

A man [Christian] is not justified by [perfect] works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus, even we [Jewish religionists] have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by works of law, for by [perfect] works of law no flesh will be justified (Gl 2:16).

This statement needs no interpretation as it is worded here. Therefore, we must dismiss our hopes of establishing some legal code of law by which we would identify ourselves as Christians, other than the fact that we have individually obeyed the instructions of Acts 2:38. We must dismiss this notion that we can keep perfectly any legal code of law in order to be successfully justified before God.

It must be noted that there are some very important concepts in Galatians 2:16, and similar passages, that must be understood in order to restore a gospel foundation for ourselves as the people of God. Both Paul and Peter, as faithful Jews, were Christians because of their individual belief and obedience of the gospel (At 22:16), not, as Paul reminded Peter, because of our successful performance of law.

Grace does not dismiss law, but neither does law dismiss grace. If we use law to either dismiss or marginalize grace, however, we have allowed law to condemn us.

- **A false sense of righteousness:** Seeking to be justified by our own perfect law-keeping or good works as a Christian is a direct attack against the gospel of the Son of God. In Paul’s statement of **Galatians 2:16**, some translators have translated

the text in a way that would encourage a self-righteous system of law-keeping that would marginalize, if not ignore, the gospel journey of the incarnate Son of God that Peter preached on Pentecost. In fact, the mistranslation of this verse marginalizes the very point of the gospel of grace that Paul publicly emphasized in his rebuke of Peter.

We are often held in bondage by a prejudiced “translation” of Galatians 2:16 and similar texts. **It is a translation of the Greek text that leads some to question their own faith in reference to being righteous before God.** And more seriously, the unfortunate translation encourages a sense of self-righteousness that is contrary to the very themes of both **Romans** and **Galatians**. (We must dwell on this point for a moment because it is critical to understanding who we are as Christians, in contrast to those who pose to be “Christian” because of their meritorious good works.)

- **Our righteousness was made possible through the faith of the incarnate Son:** By literally translating the Greek **objective genitive**, Galatians 2:16 reveals this profound truth: *“A man is not justified by works of law, but by the faith of Christ Jesus.”* And as if we might forget this point, or even marginalize its importance, by being arrogant about our own self-righteousness, Paul repeated his thought in the statement in the same verse: *“We have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ.”* **Therefore, Christians have faith in the faith of Jesus to have done all that was necessary in order to make us righteous before God.**

In Galatians 2:16, and throughout the book of Galatians, Paul was bringing to his readers’ attention a sense of reassurance that came through the active faith of Jesus, as opposed to the apprehension that came with the legalistic Jews who were preaching “another gospel” to the Gentiles (Gl 1:6-9). We

see in this one verse, therefore, Paul's argument of the entire book against the "other gospel" practitioners.

- **The gospel plus works:** Some Jewish Christians were certainly preaching the gospel, but they were also adding to their sermons legal requirements of the Sinai law (circumcision) or religious traditions that they believed must also be obeyed in order to guarantee one's justification before God (See Mk 7:1-9). And if they sinned—and they all did—then they preached that there was justification through performed meritorious good works to atone for sin.

In other words, some in Galatia were preaching the simple gospel, but they were adding the necessity of perfect law-keeping and the supposed self-atonement of good works. Their sermons subsequently concluded in preaching "another gospel." The result of their preaching this "other gospel" was that the righteousness that came through the performing faith of Jesus that took Him to the cross was made insufficient. Because they failed to understand the mercy and grace of God that was poured out at the cross, they established their own system of righteousness by which they could be justified before God (We will comment later on Romans 10:1-3.)

Therefore, the Greek text of Galatians 2:16 **should not** read as some versions that introduce a sense of insecurity and self-righteousness in the minds of those who may be questioning whether they have enough faith to be righteous before God. Fortunately, the Greek objective genitive of the verse drives us to focus on **the faith of Jesus Christ** who had faith in the Father in order to endure the cross for us. The "faith" that is under consideration with the objective genitive is not the faith of those who believe, but the faith of Jesus who "believed" for us. It is in His faith that we believe and trust, just as the verse states when the objective genitive is correctly emphasized. In

other words, when we consider our salvation, **our faith is in the faith of Jesus by which He took Himself to the cross.**

Our faith is not in ourselves to perform law flawlessly or do good works—or just be a good person—in order to earn our own salvation, and thus claim to be justified before God. Our faith is in His performance for us at the cross, not in our performance of law or a supposed self-atonement through good works. In order to be redundant on this very important definition as to who a Christian truly is, we again refer to 2 Corinthians 4:15: *“For all things are for your sakes, so that **the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.**”*

- **His faith, not our faith:** Many translations of Galatians 2:16 read, *“... a man is not justified by works of law,”*—so far so good—*“but by faith in Jesus Christ.”* This is a slip in objective translation in this particular text. **Translations that make this slip miss Paul’s argument of the entire book of Galatians that is brought out in this one verse.** Faith “in Jesus” in order to be saved is indeed necessary (See Jn 20:30,31). But our faith is not Paul’s primary point in Galatians 2:16. He wanted his readers to focus on the faith of Jesus Christ, not on their own personal faith, which faith is often weak. When personal faith is weak, this does not mean that our righteousness before God is slipping. We continue to be righteous before God even in our weak faith because the faith of Jesus in going to the cross **did not slip**, though He struggled in the final hours (See Lk 24:44).

The actual Greek text of Galatians 2:16 should literally read, *“through faith of Christ,”* or, *“through [the] faith of Christ.”* **This is the literal translation of the Greek text** that honors the objective genitive that Paul used to uphold his theme of the entire book of Galatians, as well as Romans. The objective

genitive presents an entirely different emphasis in reference to whose faith is involved in reference to our justification: our faith, or the faith of Christ?

In Galatians 2:16, and similar verses that use the objective genitive, the emphasis is on the faith of Jesus, not on our faith. If we understand Paul's point in Galatians 2:16, then our faith in the faith of Jesus is encouraged, not marginalized, or questioned if we do not believe that our faith is strong enough to make us righteous before God.

• **We have faith in Jesus to have had the faith to go to the cross for our justification, and thus make us righteous before God:** As previously stated, several translators have unfortunately made an arbitrary rendition of Galatians 2:16 by ignoring the objective genitive in reference to the faith of Jesus on which Paul focused. The same objective genitive is used in Ephesians 3:12 in order to turn our attention again to the results of the faith of Jesus to make us righteous before God.

The literal translation of the Greek objective genitive should use "of," not "in." "Faith" in the statement of both Galatians 2:16 and **Ephesians 3:12** is in the possession of Jesus, not ourselves. In other words, it is our faith in **the faith of Christ Jesus** our Lord that empowers us to "*have **boldness** and access with **confidence** through the faith **of Him***" (Ep 3:12). This is an overwhelming feeling of comfort.

The Greek text of Ephesians 3:12 reads "**of** Him (Christ)" because Paul focused on the work of Christ to reveal the righteousness of God. This is in contrast to our often weak faith to claim some righteousness for ourselves that would be based on either our presumed perfect law-keeping or meritorious good works.

The commentary passage of this discussion, therefore, would be a correct translation of **Philippians 3:9**. Paul wrote that he was “*found in Him [Christ], **not having my own righteousness that is from law** [keeping], but that which is through the faith of Christ [objective genitive], the righteousness that is from God by [His] faith.*” This is a most profound statement. **This is the very foundation upon which we identify ourselves as Christians.** In fact, this is why we are Christians. The church is a membership of people who have been delivered out of the bondage of self-righteous performances in their own religiosity, in order to be set free by grace wherein the members enjoy the righteousness of God that comes to them through the faith of Jesus going to the cross.

The preceding affirmation of Paul would certainly help us understand better what he meant when he wrote **Romans 1:17**: “*For in it [the gospel] is the righteousness of God revealed from [Jesus’] faith to [our faith], as it is written, ‘the just will live by faith’ [in Jesus].*” Our faith, therefore, is in the faith of Jesus Christ, through whom the righteousness of God was revealed through the cross. So now we need to carry on with His righteousness that is in us, which righteousness came through His faith. We must carry on trusting in His faith lest we try to lay claim to our own self-righteous justification that we would suppose to have worked out through some meritorious performance of law, good works or experiential behavior.

Our faith is in the faith of Jesus who delivered us from the futility of trusting in our efforts to trust in our own faith in order to be righteous before God.

- **The difference between “of” and “in”:** We are not embarrassed to be redundant on this point simply because the religious world of Christendom teaches contrary to the gospel in the matter of our faith in the gospel.

Therefore, we must repeat that there is a vast difference between the use of the words “of” or “in” in the statements of Galatians 2:16 and Ephesians 3:12. The word “of” **focuses our attention on the faith of Jesus**, whereas the word “in” **focuses our attention on our ability to make ourselves righteous before God because of our own faith**.

Specifically, the word “in” moves us to focus on the performance of our personal faith in order to be justified, and thus, righteous before God. This understanding is **subjective**, that is, we make our own determination concerning whether we have faithfully performed in order to earn our justification, and thus stand righteous before God. **But this is an effort to marginalize the gospel of Jesus Christ**, who, through His own faith, took Himself to the cross to be God’s righteousness for us (Jn 10:15-18). The self-righteous religionists of the world who obsess over their own faith to be righteous before God, marginalizes, if not, ignores the faith of Christ.

Now compare this thought to the use of the word “of” in reference to the faith of Jesus. The word “of” in the objective genitive focuses our attention on Jesus, by whom, through His faith, we are made righteous by His redemptive sacrifice at the cross. Now consider this thought in the use of the word “in,” that is, to focus on our faith. The word “in” focuses attention on our supposed righteousness that we earn through the performance of our faith, either through law-keeping, good works, or meritorious worship assemblies.

The more cultic we perform our assemblies, the more righteous we claim ourselves to be after performing the rites of the cult. In other words, in the text “of” is gospel; “in” is another gospel, if not the behavior of those who collectively perform some legal assembly they can open and turn off with a well-performed prayer. The point is that we are justified by

our faith in Jesus' faith who took Himself to the cross for our justification, not by some legal performance we can conjure up on Sunday morning to make ourselves righteous before God (See Rm 10:1-3).

According to Paul's argument throughout the book of Galatians and Romans, our saving faith in Jesus as the incarnate Son of God must move us to trust in His faith that moved Him to go to the cross for us. This is in opposition to our own faith to keep law perfectly in order to be self-justified.

- **Righteous because of His faith, not ours:** A Christian is identified as one who trusts in the righteousness that Jesus brings to us through the cross. This is opposed to claiming our own righteousness through either law-keeping or meritorious good works. We cannot over-emphasize this truth. We cannot simply because any understanding of the righteousness that we enjoy as the people of God is totally dependent on trusting in the faith of Christ. It was by His faith that He took Himself to the cross to make us righteous before God.

Our righteousness is not the result of our perfect obedience to some code of doctrine that identifies us as a Christian. Neither is it attained by the performance of our faith in good works. On the contrary, *"There is none righteous, no, not one"* (Rm 3:10). Therefore, our righteousness can never be dependent solely on the performance of our faith, either in reference to law or good works.

If we assume that our righteousness is attained through our faithful and perfect performance of some code of law, then we are supposing to be righteous on the merit of our own faith. If we would assume this, then we have disqualified ourselves from the righteousness of God that comes to us totally through the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul would rebuke us by saying that we are promoting "another gospel," and thus, we stand condemned before God (See again Gl 1:6-9). ***"You have***

*been severed from Christ, you who seek to be justified by law [keeping]. **You have fallen from grace***" (Gl 5:4).

Every honest Christian is usually never satisfied with his or her own faith. For this reason, we are never satisfied with the performance of our faith. We know that we never believe and do enough. We conclude every day with James 4:17 staring us in face. However, we must not fear, for we are righteous before God through the faith of Jesus because of what He performed for us at the cross.

• **A doorway into God's righteousness: Romans 10:1-4** is the doorway into understanding the difference between our supposed self-righteousness through the performance (law-keeping) of our faith, and the righteousness that comes through **the performance of the faith of Jesus Christ on the cross**. We sometimes have so much confidence in our own legal performance of law that we need to read with care Paul's rebuke of such thinking in the text of Romans 10:1-4.

Paul began Romans 10 by saying, "*They [the self-righteous] have a zeal for God, **but not according to knowledge** [of the grace of God]" (Rm 10:2). Because some are truly "*ignorant of God's righteousness*" that was revealed through the faith of the Lord Jesus, they seek "*to establish their own righteousness*" (Rm 10:3). And in doing so they "***have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God***" (Rm 10:3).*

Therefore, before we would identify ourselves as the people of God who have established our own self-righteousness by some meritorious obedience to a legal system of law, it might be good to remember that in doing such we are marginalizing the righteousness that was revealed through the faith of Jesus who made us righteous at the cross. It is for this reason that "***Christ is the end of law***" for all those who seek to stand

righteous before God on the basis of the righteousness of God that was made possible through the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rm 10:4).

Everyone who claims righteousness that is based on their own perfect performance of faith in law-keeping have cut themselves off from the righteousness of God that was revealed through the faith of Jesus Christ (See Gl 5:4).

Article 7

Christians Are Identified By Their Workmanship²¹

Christians are identified as grace-motivated people who have responded to the grace of God by which they have been saved. It is as Paul wrote to the Corinthian disciples, “*All things [salvationally] are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God*” (2 Co 4:15). Paul was speaking from personal experience. Grace caused a bountiful work in his personal life. Before grace touched his understanding of how one relates with God, and while he walked in the strict legal-oriented religion of Judaism—even to the persecuting of Christians—he was zealous to keep the statutes of the Jews’ religion (Gl 1:13,14). He was strong on legal obedience to law, but weak on grace and mercy. However, when grace appeared to him in the person of Jesus on a Damascus road, his entire life radically changed. Once changed, he later wrote,

But by the grace of God I am what I am. And His grace toward me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me (1 Co 15:10).

The fact that Paul labored more abundantly than all his fellow legal-driven religionists who remained in the bondage of Juda-

ism is a testimony to the power of the grace of the gospel over legal performances of law. Our desire to keep law moves us to be obedient. This is good. However, there is often an emptiness in law-keeping obedience. Once we have performed all the precepts of the law, we still feel lacking. And lacking we are, for we fear that we may have missed a minor precept of the law, or at least did not perform the law perfectly. We thus conclude that we are law-breakers and stand condemned before God. And our conclusion, without grace, would be correct.

By comparison, grace stimulates greater obedience because one lives in appreciation of the grace. This is in the meaning of what Paul wrote to the Roman disciples who were struggling to come out of the behavior of bondage from which Paul was called by Jesus: *“Do we then make void law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, **we establish law**”* (Rm 3:31). It is all in the manner by which we approach law. Do we keep law in order to justify ourselves before God, or do we keep law out of appreciation for what God did for us through His incarnate Son?

The grace-driven disciple will always work more abundantly to establish law in his or her life, and at the same time, be obedient to law with peace of mind.

Paul's abounding work when he experienced grace concurs with the teaching of James' working faith in the text of **James 2:14-26**. It seems that some of those to whom James wrote were satisfied with a "dead faith" that would cause no good works in their lives. So James interrogated these workless "believers," *“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith [alone] save him?”* (Js 2:14). James' question begs the response, "Certainly not!"

James rebuked the "faith only" disciples with the words,

“Even so faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (Js 2:17). James continued his rebuke of the disciples who professed to be followers of Jesus, but at the same time, were not caused to be thankful for what Jesus did for them on the cross: *“But are you willing to know, O foolish man, **that faith with works is dead?**”* (Js 2:24). Therefore, *“a man is justified by works [of faith] and not by faith only”* (Js 2:24). The point is that if our faith is in our own selves, then our faith is self-oriented. We make the gospel powerless to drive us to work more abundantly.

In other words, the church is identified as a body of people who have expressed their faith in the grace of God that appeared on the cross. There is no such thing as a body of true Christians who are inactive. Some inactive people, unfortunately, try to hang on to a local body of active members who are working in response to the grace of God, thinking that their association with such a group will take them into eternal glory. However, they are simply dead-faith members who have deceived themselves into believing that their fellowship with grace-driven members will save them. They have forgotten Revelation 14:13: *“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘so that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow them.’”*

Article 8

Christians Are Identified As Grateful People²²

The behavioral identity of a true disciple of Jesus is revealed by the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 4:15: *“For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause **thanksgiving** to abound to the glory of God.”*

- **Thanksgiving response to grace:** Any meritorious self-righteous performance of law marginalizes the grace of God that causes thanksgiving to abound in our lives. Meritorious self-righteousness is a challenge to grace-motivated living because one is not motivated by grace, but by one's personal trust in his or her meritorious law-keeping and good works.

Even in the first century some did not comprehend this fundamental principle of grace upon which we are established ourselves as the people of God. So the Holy Spirit reprimanded all the self-righteous meritorious law-keepers with the words: ***“For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves [in a supposed effort to keep law perfectly], it [grace] is the gift of God”*** (Ep 2:8). And as if some failed to understand this clear statement, the Spirit added that we are not justified by ***“works [of law or merit], lest anyone should boast”*** (Ep 2:9). In other words, if we would suppose that we are saved through meritorious law-keeping and good works, then we might boast against a fellow brother or sister whom we may judge to be slack in law keeping, or at least not performing enough good works.

If grace is a gift, then it can never be earned. Therefore, the more one tries to meritoriously earn grace through law-keeping and good works, the more one marginalizes the grace of God at the cross.

If there were such a thing as meritorious salvation by good works, then we would be tempted to start comparing good works with one another, concluding that the person who has the most good works is the most righteous. If good works either merit or guarantee our salvation, then surely we would start boasting with one another about our personal accomplishments. It is for this reason that **one can never be identified as a Christian because of good works**, even works in the name of Christ. If one were justified by good works, then we could

simply ignore what Jesus said one must do as His disciples (See Mt 28:19,20). Even worse, we might be tempted to believe that all those who do not believe in Jesus as the Christ are justified before God because they are good people who do good works. **Such a belief is blasphemy against the necessity of the incarnation of the Son of God and the cross.**

Therefore, if we argue that we are Christians because of our perfect keeping of some system of law, or our supposed atonement by good works, then we should probably study again Ephesians 2 and the entirety of the document of Galatians. We might not yet perceive that it is dangerous to identify ourselves as the people of God because we have established some system of law by which we would identify ourselves by our meritorious performance of law, or our good works about which we might boast. If we do, then we will surely run into conflict with what the Holy Spirit wrote to the Roman disciples: *“For if Abraham was justified by works [of merit], he has something about which to boast, **but not before God**”* (Rm 4:2). *“You who make your boast of law [keeping], **do you dishonor God through breaking the law?**”* (Rm 2:23). *“Where then is boasting? **It is excluded.** By what law? Of works? **No, but by the law of faith**”* (Rm 3:27).

Therefore, the reason we cannot identify Christians by some system of meritorious law-keeping is in the fact that God knew that no one could keep any system of law perfectly in order to merit (earn) a salvational relationship with Him. This is true because all sin, or we might say, all continue to sin annually a merited relationship with God (See Rm 3:9,10,23; 1 Jn 1:8). We would be surprised, therefore, if there were some system of law given by God by which we would attempt to be saved on the basis of our personal obedience. It is for this reason that Christians are first identified by their gospel response to God's grace. It is not goodness that saves, but the gospel.

Therefore, each individual must cry out as those on Pentecost in Acts 2:37: *“Men and brethren, what will we do?”* Only God can answer what one must do! And that answer was first expressed by Peter in Acts 2:38.

This point does not mean that there are no laws to obey or good works to do as Christians. On the contrary, Christians are motivated to keep the law of Christ and do good works **because they are saved by grace**. This was Paul’s argument in Ephesians 2:10: *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we should walk in them.”* It is grace that causes one to work to the glory of God (See 2 Co 4:15).

Christians work because they are saved, not in order to be saved. It is for this reason that the one who claims to have faith without works has simply deceived himself or herself. In referring to the obedience of Abraham, James explained: *“You see that faith was working with his works, and by works was faith made perfect”* (Js 2:22). Therefore, one *“is justified by works **and not by faith only**”* (Js 2:24).

Article 9

Christians Are Identified As A Collective Of People

It was not without purpose that during His earthly ministry Jesus chose the Greek word *ekklesia* to describe what was coming in the near future. Therefore, upon the rock that He was proven to be the Christ (Messiah) and Son of God, He promised His inner circle of Jewish disciples, *“I will build My **ekklesia** [church]”* (Mt 16:18).

Those Jewish disciples to whom Jesus personally made this statement knew exactly what an *ekklesia* was in the town cul-

ture of their day, and in their Jewish history. When the Jews came to the synagogue they came as a **people** to the *ekklesia* (assembly) (At 13:43). When idol worshipers in Ephesus came together into their temple of Artemis, they, too, came as a gathering of **people** to the *ekklesia* (At 19:30). On this occasion when Paul was preaching the gospel in Ephesus, the *ekklesia* (assembly of people) in the temple became quite confused in reaction to what he preached (At 19:32). It was the **people**, the *ekklesia*, who were confused, not the temple structure itself. The word *ekklesia*, therefore, was never used in the culture of the New Testament era to refer to physical structures.

So when Jesus promised He would build His *ekklesia*, the Jewish disciples to whom He spoke these words in Matthew 16:18 knew that He was referring to **people**, not to “church houses.” The Jewish apostles to whom Jesus promised that He would build His *ekklesia* of people could go further back in their history as the people of God in order to understand what Jesus was promising. It was to this nation of people (the Jewish people) to whom Stephen referred when he confirmed that before His incarnation, the Son of God “*was in the ekklesia [people—“church”] in the wilderness*” (At 7:38). It was this *ekklesia* of people who “*were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the [Red] Sea*” (1 Co 10:2). This *ekklesia* of people was delivered out of the bondage of Egyptian captivity because they committed themselves to follow Moses. They were, as a people, baptized into Moses when they followed him through the Red Sea. Jesus Christ was the Prophet whom Moses promised would replace him as the leader of the *ekklesia* (See Dt 18:15-22). So in order to become a part of Jesus’ *ekklesia*, and subsequently be delivered out of the bondage of sin, Jewish believers too would have to be **baptized** into Christ.

Since Jesus was the Prophet about whom Moses prophesied would come after him, then people today can be baptized into the name of this Prophet, the name of Christ (At 2:38; Rm 6:3-6; Gl 3:27). Therefore, in order to replace the *ekklesia* of people who followed Moses out of Egyptian bondage, the *ekklesia* (people) of Christ is composed today of those people who have followed Christ out of the bondage of sin. These are those who have been baptized in the name of their King. **The identity of the church, therefore, is first identified as people** who have been delivered out of sin. These are those who have believed that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ and incarnate Son of God, just as Jesus had promised His Jewish disciples in Matthew 16:18.

As people believed in Moses, and subsequently were baptized unto Moses in the Red Sea in order to be delivered out of the bondage of Egypt, so people today believe in Christ and are baptized unto Him in order to be delivered out of the bondage of sin.

Unless we understand that there are two different uses of the word *ekklesia* in reference to the people of God, we will never fully appreciate the Holy Spirit's use of the word *ekklesia* after Acts 2. Before Acts 2, specifically in Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, "*I will build My church [ekklesia].*" In this statement He was explaining **His ownership** of the coming *ekklesia*, which at the time had not yet been established. He was using the word *ekklesia* in the context of who His people would be in reference to what Peter had just declared in the context of Matthew 16. These people, this *ekklesia*, would be those who believed that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God (Mt 16:16,17). Jesus thus used the word *ekklesia* before Acts 2 as a **noun** to refer to His people who would come after Acts 2.

But as previously stated, and in the historical use of the word *ekklesia*, the word also refers to what the *ekklesia* **does**. In

other words, the *ekklesia* (owned by Christ), **comes together** in *ekklesia* (assembly) (1 Co 11:1 Hb 10:24,25). The use of the word *ekklesia* in the New Testament refers **to who the people of God are, as well as to what they do**, especially on the first day of the week. In other words, the *ekklesia* of Christ, *ekklesia* (assembles) on the first day of the week. Unless one makes the distinction between these two uses of the word *ekklesia*, he or she will never fully understand the church (*ekklesia*) of Christ. If we make this distinction, however, we will better understand what Jesus promised in Matthew 16:18, that His *ekklesia* was not some legally defined organization. It might help by noting that during His earthly ministry, Jesus was defining what His *ekklesia* would be, whereas in Acts and throughout the epistles, the Holy Spirit was explaining how the *ekklesia* functioned in the community.

Article 10

Christians Are Identified By Their Worshipful Life²³

In order to restore that which is true, and according to the word of God, we sometimes must be somewhat negative in our approach and discovery of that which is according to the word of God. This principle of discovery is certainly needed in our investigation of how we worship God. Because worship must come from within our hearts, and not be pumped in from outside stimulus, we must always check ourselves on this matter. Therefore, it is not negative to be sincere about how God seeks to be worshipped.

In recognition of the fact that we who have obeyed the gospel, cannot afterward live a sinless life, some have invented a ritualistic system of meritorious “worship” to perform on Sunday morning in order to atone for sins of the past week.

These sins were supposedly committed between the closing prayer last Sunday morning and the opening prayer the following Sunday. Once the worship performances are completed, then some assume that they are back in the “graces of God,” and thus their relationship is restored with God. Our Sunday ceremonial laws of identity, therefore, can supposedly be performed within a window of time on Sunday morning in order to legally restore our relationship with God.

This concept of worship has given rise to the concept of “the hour of worship,” which concept is nowhere found in the New Testament. The belief, therefore, presents a problem, especially in view of the fact that Jesus said that His people would worship **anytime** and **anywhere** (See Jn 4:21-24).

If we go deeper into this concept of worship, some surprising conclusions are discovered. After successfully performing the required ceremonies during the “hour of worship,” or exhausting oneself in an experiential euphoria of entertaining “worship,” the attending adherent is supposedly released from a sense of guilt over sins that were committed throughout the past week—at least one goes away from such an assembly feeling better. In order to validate the existence of this supposed “worship atonement” through “worshipful” performances, the “hour of worship” is opened with an “opening prayer” and concluded with a “closing prayer.” The performance of the ceremonies between the two prayers, it is believed, becomes an “offering” of atonement for all sins committed outside the “worship hour.” After the “closing prayer,” therefore, the “faithful” worshiper, if he or she has specifically and meritoriously performed the “acts of worship,” or exhausted oneself in a chaotic euphoric experience, can supposedly walk away from the assembly with a reassuring sense of having restored his or her righteousness. By doing such it is presumed that one has returned to being a faithful member of the church.

Subsequently, after such a performance, some have convinced themselves with a false sense of reassurance because they have faithfully performed the “worship” ceremonies on Sunday morning. In other words, there is no need for grace between the opening and closing prayers on Sunday morning simply because supposed “acts (laws) of worship” are being performed by which one is self-justified in obedience to the supposed laws. We resort to grace only after the closing prayer. We do so because we have led ourselves to believe that our “faithful” performance of our ceremonies of law between the opening and closing prayers have atoned for all our sins outside the “hour of worship.”

In view of the preceding belief and behavior in reference to establishing a legal identity of the worship of the church, and the faithful obedience thereof, we have inadvertently established a legal identity of the church that is based on law, not grace. **By focusing on the merit of our worship performances, we are forced to move grace aside during the performance of law within the “hour of worship.”** However, the problem with this belief is that we cannot substitute some meritorious system of “worship laws” as atonement for our sins, even if we define the performed acts to be “worship.”

• **We are righteous because of the cross, not our cries:** By being obedient to a catechism of worship ceremonies, we might presumptuously declare that we have been made perfect in our worship obedience, and thus justified before God because of our faithful worship attendance. But worship can never be considered a behavioral performance for the atonement of our sins. To think so is only a deception brought on by a spirit of self-righteousness. If we feel righteous after the performance of our worship ceremonies, or the exhilaration that may come from a well-performed concert, **then we might lean toward**

being self-righteous because of what we performed or experienced during the “hour of worship.” But to “feel” such is to marginalize the grace of God and ignore the righteousness of God that comes to us through the gospel of the cross.

Such self-righteousness is contrary to the very nature of the people of God as revealed in the New Testament (Compare Rm 10:1-3). Such is contrary to the faith of Jesus whereby He took Himself to the cross for us. His gospel action at the cross was a result of His faith (See Gl 2:16). We would never, therefore, consider the expression of our faith in worship as a substitute for His faith to make us righteous through the cross. **Any sense of self-righteousness because of the performance of our faith is an attack against the righteousness that comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ.**

The family of God (the church) is identified as those who are gospel obedient, not by those who have faithfully adhered to a catechism of worship laws by which they would presumptuously earn a righteous standing before God.

• **Gospel saves, not church:** So where do we go from here, understanding that we cannot establish a “legal church” by which we can be saved through perfect law-keeping, and thus identify ourselves as Christians because we have faithfully performed some ceremonial catechism of worship, or exhausted ourselves in cries at the altar?

Church saves no one because the church is the saved. And the saved are saved by grace. Christians are not saved by perfect obedience to some system of law-keeping by which they would presumptuously and self-righteously submit their religious performances to God in order to demand justification on the basis of their meritorious behavior. If we assume this, then we walk contrary to what the Holy Spirit stated in Romans 4:4: *“Now to him who works [to declare his own*

righteousness], *the reward is not credited according to grace, but according to debt.*” The point of this statement is that we cannot perform any system of law that would put God in debt to save us.

It is for this reason that the Christian can never “go to church” in order to perform some salvational catechisms of worship. **Christians are church through grace before they show up at the “church house” on Sunday morning.** In fact, the daily lives of Christians is truly a **living worship** of God (See Rm 12:1). Christians can assemble—which thing they naturally do—but they are not validated as Christian or church when they assemble as the church.

The *ekklesia* (church) in the New Testament refers to those people who obeyed the gospel in baptism, not to some system of law or law-keeping over which the adherents would hang a unique name.

If a Christian is identified as such by certain legal actions of worship on Sunday morning, or good works, then inherently in our understanding of the church in this manner **we have denied that the church is identified as people who have obediently responded to the faith of Christ Jesus.**

One may validate himself or herself as a member of a legally defined “church.” However, and on the contrary, we validate ourselves as Christians because of our response to the faith of the Son of God, which faith ended Him up on a cross in order that we be imputed with the righteousness of God through His blood. Jesus did not establish a catechism of law by which His people would be identified, or declare themselves righteous as a result of their own performance of law (See Jn 13:34,35). Christians are identified as a submitted fellowship of people who have responded to the gospel that Jesus is the incarnate and crucified Son of God (See At 2).

The 3,000 on Pentecost, therefore, were not later identified as church because they responded to some system of law that Peter preached, or that they had carried out obedience to certain ceremony of worship. On the contrary, they were the church of God's people on that very day. They would later be declared Christians because they responded in baptism to the first announcement that Jesus, whom they had crucified, was now reigning in heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords (At 2:26-36). As they responded to this news, and subsequently followed the instructions of Peter in Acts 2:38, they were accepted and added to the *ekklesia* of Christ. Simply stated, and clearly explained by Jesus at the conclusion of His ministry, those who believe that He is the Christ, and thus determine to follow Him as a disciple, become Christian when they are baptized into Christ in the name of Christ (Read again Mt 28:19,20).

The question of those on Pentecost concerning what they must do to rectify what they did, involved an obedient response to who Jesus was at the time of their remorseful inquiry. Instructions were given by the Holy Spirit through Peter, but the instructions did not originate with any man. They were not of human origin. It is always in this context of meaning that we must understand the Spirit-inspired imperative of Acts 2:38. Baptism into Christ was not a legal command, but a faith-response to the grace of God. If there is no baptism, then one's faith is insufficient (See Hb 11:6). It is dead (See Js 2:19,20). How can one presume to be Christian when he or she refuses to respond to the first official announcement of the crucified, resurrected, and reigning Jesus of Nazareth who is now reigning as King of kings?

• **Grace-motivated response:** Now that the grace of God has been revealed through the faith of the incarnate Son of God (Rm 5:17), we must conclude that any identity of ourselves as

Christians is always based on the gospel of God's grace that was revealed through His incarnate Son. This means that we can never be identified by a legal obedience to some system of law, but by the reflection of the grace of God in our lives that moves us to be obedient to the word of Christ (Jn 12:48). And it is by our love for one another that spills over into our communities that defines us as the people of God who have thankfully responded to God's grace (See Jn 13:34,35; A 2:40-47).

Article 11

Christians Are Identified As People Of Love²⁴

- **Reflecting grace:** So if the word “church” refers to people—and it does—then the members of the church must live lives that reflect the love and grace of God in the communities in which they live. There is simply no such thing as a “Christian” who does not reflect the love of God. It is by this gospel of loving behavior that we begin to understand the nature of what it means to be a Christian, and thus, the church of Christ.

The difference between the true *ekklesia* (assembly of God's people—church), and the churches of religious people who follow a legal catechism of rites, rituals and ceremonies, is that one group is gospel respondent and the other is ritual obedient.

Notice what John wrote about the identity of the *ekklesia* within the communities in which the members live: “*We love because He first loved us*” (1 Jn 4:19). God's grace was poured out on us because of His love for us. His love was not a statement of Scripture. It was a living demonstration. God demonstrated “*His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rm 5:8).

God's love, therefore, was revealed through the offering of the cross. It is still true today that *"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"* (Jn 3:16). This indeed must be the true behavioral identity of those who would claim to be Christians, and thus compose the *ekklesia* (church) of the Christ. Love was poured out on us, and so we pour out our love on those in our community. Therefore, we no longer wonder why the only begotten Son would identify His people with the following words:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn 13:34,35).

Jesus proclaimed that His *ekklesia* of people would be identified by their love for one another as God had loved them. His people are as John wrote: "Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3:18).

Article 12

Christians Are Identified As People Called Out To Go Out²⁵

The Greek word is actually the combination of two different Greek words, one meaning "out" and the other meaning "to call." As previously stated, the original use of the combined word was used in Greek culture to refer to **a general assembly of people or leaders of a community who were "called out" for a "town hall" meeting** (See At 13:43; 19:30,32,39,41). Therefore, the combined word, *ekklesia*, was not originally used in a religious context, but as a specific Greek word that referred to a called-out public assembly of people. Jesus simply used the word *ekklesia* because it was the only word in the Greek dictionary that would in some way identify those who had been called out of the world through their voluntary response to the gospel.

The church is composed of all those in whose hearts Jesus now reigns because they responded to His call through the gospel (Lk 17:20,21; Rm 5:17). Because people have answered His call, they are Christians with their citizenship in heaven (At 20:28; Ph 3:20,21; Ti 2:14; 1 Pt 1:18,19; 2:9). Wherever the will of God is done on earth in the hearts of people as it is done in heaven (Mt 6:10), then it is there that a Christian exists. Because Christians have been called by the gospel (2 Th 2:14), they realize what must be done in order to call people out of the world. It is for this reason that Jesus mandated the mission of Mark 16:15: *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”*

If there is only one gospel-obedient person anywhere in the world, that person, as one who has answered the call of the gospel, constitutes the existence of the church where he or she is present.

By their obedience to the gospel, the *ekklesia* on earth is composed of all those throughout the realm of the kingdom of Jesus who have been called out of the bondage of sin by the gospel.

Article 13

Christians Are Identified As A Submitted Body Subjects²⁶

The Christ-sent apostles were unique in that they were personally called and commissioned by Jesus to be the first people through whom all the truth of the gospel would be revealed (See Lk 6:12-16; Jn 14:26; 16:13,17). They made a personal choice to follow Jesus in absence of any knowledge of the gospel of the cross and reassurance of the resurrection. We must consider their submission to the leadership of Jesus dur-

ing Jesus' earthly ministry as a personal commitment to Jesus since Jesus had not yet been seated in heaven as King of kings. All the promises that Jesus subsequently made to them during His earthly ministry were certainly viewed in hope since they had no reality upon which to base what they would do later after the Spirit's empowerment on Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4.²⁷ Nevertheless, during the ministry of Jesus the apostles carried on by faith in the One whom they accepted as the Messiah before the Messiah reigned as King of kings. After Acts 2, however, it was all different, and thus, it all changed in the lives of thousands of people throughout the world.

- **The beginning of the assembly of the submitted:** As previously stated, the church of Christ began in Jerusalem when people first submitted to the first official announcement by Peter of the existing kingdom reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. According to Peter's announcement, Jesus was not only the Messiah, He was at the time of the announcement the King of kings and Lord of lords. The first Christians that existed in history, therefore, were those disciples who made known their discipleship of Jesus by their submission in baptism in the name of Christ. Others must do the same today in order to manifest that Jesus is their King and Lord.

We must not forget, however, that Peter revealed to the people on Pentecost that Jesus, as was prophesied, had already ascended to the right hand of God at the time he made the announcement (See At 2:22-36). The kingdom reign of Jesus thus started at the time of Jesus' ascension to the throne of David, which ascension was **about a week before Peter's announcement** of this event on Pentecost. Therefore, **Jesus was the King of His kingdom before people on earth first knew this fact, and thus submitted to His kingship by being baptized into His name** (At 2:38).

When people submitted to King Jesus on the day of Pentecost, it was then that Jesus became the head of His *ekklesia* (church) of submitted subjects on earth. The *ekklesia* of Christ began, therefore, **because Jesus was already reigning as the King of His kingdom. Jesus was King of His kingdom before He was the head of the church of those who submitted to His kingship.** As then, so today, we identify Christians by those who have submitted to the reign of King Jesus. This truth is explained in the following list of historical events:

1. A week before Pentecost, Jesus ascended to the Father in order to reign from heaven as King of His kingdom (Dn 2:44; 7:13,14; see At 1:9-11).
2. It was after the ascension of Jesus, and a week later, that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles on Pentecost to signal a new dispensation of God working in the affairs of this world through His reigning Son (Jl 2:28-32; see At 2:1-4,16-24).
3. The events of Pentecost in Acts 2 took place in the last days of national Israel in order to signal to all Jews that the *ekklesia* of national Israel was coming to a close and the new *ekklesia* (church) of King Jesus was coming into existence (Jl 2:28; Is 2:1-5; see Mt 16:18; At 2:16,17; Hb 1:1,2).
4. People of all nations, subsequently, flowed unto the kingship of Jesus. Upon their baptism in the name of this new King they were added by God to those who originally believed that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God (Is 2:1-5; Mc 4:1-3; see Lk 24:47; At 2:41,47).
5. It was on the day of Pentecost that King Jesus became the head of those who obeyed the gospel on that day (See Cl 1:18).
6. On the day of Pentecost, God established a new covenant with all those who obeyed the gospel by baptism into Christ in the name of Christ (Jr 31:31-34; see Hb 8:6-18).
7. As a response to the gospel, members of the new *ekklesia* of Christ went forth, under the mandate of their King, to announce (preach) to the world that there was a new King who had been crowned in heaven (See Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16; At 8:4).

Christians must first be identified by those individuals who have submitted to the reign of King Jesus and have been baptized in the name of King Jesus.

• **The collective of gospel-submitted subjects:** As an organically functioning body of submitted individuals (See 1 Co 12:20-31), the church is the collective assembly of people on earth of all those who have responded to the gospel of the kingdom reign of Jesus. These gospel-respondent subjects are referred to with different references in the New Testament that define who they are in their relationship with Christ, as well as their relationship with one another.

1. **Disciples**, who follow Jesus (At 11:26).
2. **Brethren**, in fellowship with one another and Christ (Ph 4:21; Hb 2:17; 1 Pt 2:17).
3. **Christians**, called after Christ (At 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pt 4:16).
4. **Members**, of a universal functioning body (1 Co 12:27).
5. **Saints**, sanctified by the blood (Rm 1:7; Ep 1:1; Ph 1:1).
6. **Servants**, who minister to the needs of others (Rm 16:1,2).
7. **Children of God**, as offspring of God (Gl 3:26; 1 Jn 3:1,2).
8. **Priests**, who serve daily as God's temple (1 Pt 2:5,9; Rv 1:6).

Wherever one obeys the gospel anywhere in the world, the church exists where that gospel-obedient subjects lives.

As on the Pentecost of Acts 2, the church, and thus Christians, came into existence because of people who submitted in their hearts to King Jesus. The submitted, as the church, were not defined by their some legal submission to a catechism of law. On the contrary, the church in her very beginning on the day of Pentecost was defined by about 3,000 people who submitted in their hearts to the incarnate, crucified, resurrected and ascended Son of God.

Article 14
Christians Are
Identified By Their Fellowship

• **A unified universal fellowship:** As a worldwide collective of believers, Christians are identified with phrases that define them as a universal fellowship of gospel-obedient subjects. In order that we understand the nature of their fellowship with one another, the Holy Spirit did not assign any particular name to the disciples as a collective group. If He would have done this, then the members would surely have denominated themselves from one another by choosing a favorite name by which they would seek to be identified as autonomous groups. It is for this reason that no group of subjects of the kingdom reign of Jesus should adopt for themselves a unique name that would hinder their fellowship with other members who are also gospel-obedient subjects of the King.

We must remember that when one obeys the gospel, that person is added by God to the universal fellowship of disciples, not to a specific group of disciples. When the eunuch was baptized, he was added by God to the universal church of Christ, not to a specific autonomous group of disciples (See At 8:39,40). For this reason, when the eunuch crossed the border back into Ethiopia, the church existed in Ethiopia because the eunuch was a baptized disciple of Christ.

We must never forget that because the Holy Spirit did not use a unique “name” to identify Christians, either as the universal body, or as a group of assembled disciples, **then we must assume that He never sanctioned any group of disciples to denominate themselves from other gospel-obedient disciples by referring to themselves with a unique name.** The following references to Christians worldwide proves this point. These are references in the New Testament to Christians throughout the first century who individually responded to King Jesus in their obedience to His gospel:

1. **Church of God**, those who belong to God (1 Co 1:2).

2. **Bride of Christ**, those who are married to Christ (Rv 21:9).
3. **Body of Christ**, those who function organically (Ep 1:22,23).
4. **Church of the Lord**, those whose Lord is Christ (At 20:28).
5. **Church of Christ**, those who belong to Christ (Rm 16:16).
6. **Flock of God**, the sheep who belong to God (1 Pt 5:2,3).
7. **House of God**, the dwelling place of God (1 Tm 3:15).
8. **Temple of God**, the dwelling of God (2 Co 6:16).

Because unique names are inherently divisive, the Holy Spirit did not assign a special name in the New Testament to any collective of gospel-obedient disciples, either locally or universally. All references to the disciples in the New Testament indicate their separation from the world, not from one another.

Later in the first century when some disciples began to draw themselves away from those who sought to maintain “sound teaching,” the Holy Spirit still did not assign a unique name, either to the withdrawn group, or the group of disciples who remained faithful to “sound teaching” (See 2 Tm 4:3). Even when individuals drew disciples away after themselves, the faithful did not refer to themselves with a unique name (See At 20:28-30). It seems that their example would teach us to be cautious about labeling disciples with divisive names, or even ourselves as gospel-obedient individuals.

When the Holy Spirit used the phrase “churches of Christ” in Paul’s letter to the Roman disciples, there was only one religious group in the world at that time who were disciples of Christ (See Rm 16:16). Therefore, the Spirit’s use of the plural identity, “churches of Christ,” was not to identify particular denominational groups among all those who believed in Christ. The phrase was used to identify the people of God who were disciples of Christ who came together in assemblies. These were the Christians among all the idolatrous religious groups of the time.

The desire to maintain unity among first century Christians continued into the second century. Eventually, however, the world of denominated (autonomous) religious groups arose throughout Christendom, and subsequently, individuals started to invent unique names to identify their unique religious sect. But in our context of study in the New Testament, **the divided religious world of Christendom did not exist in the first century**. In view of the fact that there exists today an assortment of religious groups that certainly have forsaken “sound teaching,” then it is incumbent on those who seek to maintain the truth of gospel to be diligent to correct those who teach “*doctrines of demons*” (1 Tm 4:1), “*fables*” (1 Tm 4:7), “*self-made religion*” (Cl 2:23), and useless “*philosophy and vain deceit*” (Cl 2:8). At the same time we teach to correct the error of those who would distort the gospel, we must be cautious about establishing unique names that would divide groups of gospel-obedient disciples into autonomous sects.

Nevertheless, it is simply incumbent on all those who have obeyed and teach the gospel of Christ to separate themselves from those who twist the truth of the gospel to their own destruction (2 Pt 3:16). These are those who do “*not abide in the teaching of Christ*” (2 Jn 9). So for this reason John warned the faithful, “*Whoever goes ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. He who abides in the teaching of Christ, he has both the Father and the Son*” (2 Jn 9).

Article 15

Christians are Identified As A Covenanted People²⁸

Those who have submitted to the lordship of Jesus have come into a saving covenant relationship with God (Hb 10:15-18). As God’s old covenant with national Israel was terminated

at the cross (Rm 7:1-4), those who have obeyed the gospel realize that they are now in a new covenant relationship with God, which covenant is individual with God, and not national. In fact, the new covenant is so radical in comparison to the national covenant that God had established at Mount Sinai with the nation of Israel, that the Holy Spirit, through Paul, had to remind some Jewish Christians of the following truth in reference to all gospel-obedient Christians:

*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. **There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bond-servant nor free. There is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ.** And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Gl 3:27-29).*

God's national covenant with Israel was taken away in order that a new personal and individual covenant be established with each member of the *ekklesia* of Christ (Hb 10:9; see Jr 31:31-34). It is no longer that individual Christians must suffer as a result of the violation of the conditions of a national covenant with God. Each individual Christian is now responsible for his or her personal responsibilities to keep the conditions of the new covenant. Under this new covenant, each Christian has the following blessings as a result of his or her response to the gospel:

1. The Christian is in a new personal and individual covenant fellowship with God (1 Co 1:9; Jn 15:4; 1 Jn 1:3).
2. The Christian has been purchased and purified by the blood of the incarnate Son of God (Mt 26:26-28; At 20:28; Ep 1:7,14; Ti 2:14; Hb 1:3; 9:14; 1 Jn 1:7).
3. The Christian has been reconciled to God because of the shed blood of Jesus for this covenant (2 Co 5:18-21; Cl 1:20-22).
4. The Christian is a holy priest in his or her covenant relationship with God (1 Pt 2:5; Rv 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).
5. The Christian is a citizen of a holy nation of God's people (1Pt 2:9).

6. The Christian, in his or her covenant with God, is registered with a heavenly citizenship (Ep 2:6,19; Ph 3:20,21).
7. The Christian is built upon the fact that he or she believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who brought us into a new covenant relationship with God, the Father (Mt 16:15-19; Jn 20:30,31; 1 Co 3:10,11).

Only those who have been baptized into a covenant relationship with God can enjoy the benefits and blessings of the new covenant.

Article 16

Christians are Identified As Members of An Organic Body²⁹

Organic means that the body of Christ functions as a united universal body of individual members. The church is not an institution that is locally organized according to the order of man-made corporate laws, institutional mandates, or corporate catechisms. Neither does the church of members function according to some order as a worldly government. On the contrary, the *ekklesia* of Christ is a monarchy with only one King who rules in the lives of individual subjects through His word alone, which word was revealed to the world through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Tm 3:16; see Jn 14:26; 16:13).

Since the word of King Jesus will be the only standard by which the subjects of the kingdom will be judged in the final judgment, then we would correctly conclude that the word of the King is now the only authority we must have in all matters of faith (Jn 12:48).³⁰

Jesus is the only head of each individual Christian, and thus,

²⁹ - RESEARCH: **Biblical Research Library**, Book 22: *The Function Of Discipleship*; Book 55: *Organic Function Of The Body Of Christ*, www.roger-e-dickson.org

³⁰ - RESEARCH: **Biblical Research Library**, Book 44: *Experiential Religion Versus Word-Based Faith*, www.roger-e-dickson.org

the head of the universal church (*ekkklesia*) of members (Ep 4:4-6). As the King of His kingdom that extends throughout the world, He rules from heaven by the authority of His word (Jn 12:48). As members live in obedience to His instructions that are revealed in the New Testament, they function in harmony with one another as one universal church regardless of where they live in the world.³¹

The gospel, and our common obedience thereof, is what keeps the organic body functioning as one throughout the world.

1. **Jesus is our head, king and high priest:** As our **Head**, Jesus seeks to direct our lives through His word (Mt 11:28,29; Jn 12:48; Rv 3:20). As our **King**, we voluntarily submit to His lordship in our hearts, and thus we obey our King (Lk 17:20,21). As our **High Priest**, we trust that Jesus took care of our sin problem at the cross, and thus, made us righteous before the Father. He continues to do so throughout our lives (Hb 7 & 8; 1 Jn 1:7).

- **Head:** From heaven, Jesus is the only center of reference to the control His body on earth (Ep 5:23; Cl 1:18).

- **King:** Jesus is the King of all things (Jn 18:36,37; 1 Tm 6:15; Rv 3:21), and thus, He reigns over all (Mt 28:18; 1 Pt 3:22). The Father has subjected all things in both the spiritual world and material world to His reign (Is 9:6,7; Dn 2:44; 7:13,14; Ep 1:20-22; Ph 2:9,10). His reign will continue until He comes again, at which time He will return kingdom reign to the Father in order that God be God in all matters of sovereignty (1 Co 15:26-28).

- **Priest:** Jesus is our High Priest who is presently seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven (Hb 4:14-16; 8:1,6). He is there to make continual intercession for all those who have submitted to His kingdom reign (Hb 7:25; 9:24; 1 Jn 1:7; 2:1).

The fact that Jesus is the head of the church means that there can never be a head of the church on earth; neither can there be another king or high priest on earth in reference to the church.

2. **Shepherds lead by their gospel-living examples:**

- **Elders** serve among the members as a plurality of qualified servants (1 Tm 3:1-7; Ti 1:5-9). They are designated and made known to the church in order to give spiritual service, guidance and counseling for the flock of God (At 14:23; 20:17; Ph 1:1; Ti 1:5).
- **Elders** of the church are also referred to in the New Testament as “**presbyters**” (“those who are older in age” – At 11:30; 14:23; 15:2,4,6,22; 1 Tm 5:17), “**overseers**,” (or, “**bishops**” in some translations – At 20:28; 1 Tm 3:1 – “those who see over the flock”), and “**pastors**,” or “**shepherds**” (“those who care for the needs of the flock” – Ep 4:11; 1 Pt 5:2). These references, as they are used in the New Testament, refer to the preceding church-designated, gospel-living elders as leaders among the flock. These words are not titles, but descriptive adjectives that define who the elders are and how they function among the members.
- **Elders** work to spiritually lead (1 Tm 5:17), teach (1 Tm 3:21), care for (1 Pt 5:1-3; Js 5:14,15), guard (At 20:28-32; Ti 1:9), and admonish the members of the body with whom they have personal contact (1 Th 5:12,13).

The gospel-living example and Bible teaching of the shepherds affects those with whom they have personal contact.

The purpose and function of elders, therefore, is to teach gospel-living to the flock of God, and thus, give an example of living the gospel for the members to follow. In this way, the shepherds do not function as authorities over the flock, but as

gospel-living shepherds who have the responsibility to spiritually lead the flock by example. Paul explained this purpose and function of elders in the following statement: *“The things that you have both learned and received and heard and seen in me, do these things and the God of peace will be with you”* (Ph 4:9; see 1 Co 11:1).

3. **Deacons, or bondservants, administer to the physical needs of the body:** The Greek word *diakonos* (deacon) is used in reference to those among the members who have been designated by the members to serve special needs of the members.
 - **Deacons** are designated to serve those members with whom they have personal contact (At 6:1-6; Ph 1:1).
 - **Deacons** have qualifications before they are designated as special servants for the disciples (1 Tm 3:8-10,12,13).
4. **Evangelists preach the gospel to the lost, as well as continue to instruct the flock in all matters concerning the gospel-journey of Jesus into and out of this world** (See Rm 1:13-16). It is the primary work of an evangelist to go forth and preach the gospel to unbelievers, though they also have responsibilities to teach the disciples in local areas.
 - **Evangelists** proclaim the good news (the gospel) to the lost (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15; Rm 1:15; 10:14,15; 1 Co 9:16; 1 Pt 1:25).
 - **Evangelists** preach the gospel to the lost, but also teach the disciples in every aspect of the gospel (Rm 1:13-16; 1 Tm 1:3-10; 4:1-3; 6,11-16; 2 Tm 2:2; Ti 3:8).
 - **Evangelists** reprove, rebuke and exhort the members of the body with longsuffering (2 Tm 4:1,2).
 - **Evangelists** are identified as church-sent apostles only

when they are sent forth by the church, and thus leave home and go forth to preach the gospel to the world (At 14:4), or carry out special mission efforts on behalf of the local disciples (Ph 2:25). Therefore, the word “apostle” is used in the New Testament to describe one who is “sent forth” for the sake of the gospel or on a special mission for the church.

- **Evangelists** are supported by the disciples in order that they go forth to preach the gospel to the lost (3 Jn 1-8).

As in the New Testament, evangelists should always be considered as one who goes forth from one location to another in order to preach the gospel or serve the needs of other disciples. Evangelists are “preachers” when they proclaim the gospel to unbelievers, but they are “teachers” when they instruct the members in the word of God.

5. **Organic function of the members:** The church, as a vibrant collective community of kingdom subjects, seeks to continue the work of Christ on earth to bring people into eternity through the preaching of the gospel (3 Jn 1-8).

- **Evangelism:** Christians preach and teach the world the gospel of the incarnation of the Son of God, His sacrificial death for our sins, His resurrection, ascension, and present kingdom reign. They also preach the good news that Jesus is returning in order to receive His disciples into the presence of God (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16; Lk 24:46,47; At 5:42; 6:7; 8:4; Cl 1:23; 1 Th 4:13-18; 1 Jn 3:2).

- **Benevolence:** Christians are defined by their love. Their love is identified by their care for the needy and good works to all men (Mt 6:1-4; 7:11,12; 25:31-46; Lk 4:18; 6:30,31; 10:25-37; 14:12-14; At 2:44,45; 4:32-37; Gl 2:10; 6:10; 1 Tm 5:3-16; Js 1:27; 2:14-26; 1 Jn 3:17,18).

- **Edification:** Christians edify one another (Rm 1:13-16; 1 Co 14:3-5,12,16) in order that they be equipped to minister in all good things, and effectively preach and teach

the gospel (At 14:22,23; Ep 4:11-16; 5:19; 6:10-18; Hb 10:24,25).

In order to be identified as a body of people who express the love of God, Christians must be known for sending forth members of the church to preach the gospel (evangelists), being benevolent to local needs, and edifying one another in order to remain true to the Lord Jesus Christ and themselves.

6. Worship of Christians:

- **Rejoicing in liberation:** Christians live with the opportunity to which Jesus released every person of faith from sin and the bondage of false religions. No longer is the worship of the members of the body confined to specific locations, or legal ceremonies of law. On the contrary, **Jesus released His disciples to worship anytime, and at any location, just as Adam, Abraham, Noah,** and other great people of faith from the beginning of time (See Jn 4:19-24; Hb 11).
- **Rejoicing by remembering:** Though every day is an opportunity for service and worship (Rm 12:1,2), Christians assemble on the first day of the week (Sunday) as a special day of fellowship and worship with one another. Each Christian should not ignore this opportunity to assembly with fellow Christians (See Hb 10:24,25). In the first century, members of the body used the opportunity of assembly to enjoy a love feast together (At 20:7; Jd 12), during which meal they partook of the bread in order to remember Christ (Lk 22:19; 1 Co 10:16), and the fruit of the vine to remember that they were a blood-purchased body of members (Mt 26:26-29; 1 Co 11:23-29).
- **Celebrating at the Supper:**³² The purpose of the Supper is to remember Jesus (Lk 22:19), not to perform a legal ceremony by which members might assume that they could justify themselves by partaking of the Supper, and thus, be

righteous before God. On the contrary, by eating of the bread and drinking the fruit of the vine, Christians rejoice over the fact that they have been justified, and thus been made righteous by the cross of Jesus (1 Co 11:24). The Supper is the Christian's celebration to remember Jesus for delivering us from meritorious law-keeping, and thus being delivered from sin. The Supper is therefore a time of celebration on the first day of the week. It is a moment to thank Jesus for making each participant righteous by following through with His faith to go to the cross for us (1 Co 11:24). Because the Supper is so important to being a disciple of Christ, Christians can be identified by their regular observance of the Supper (See At 20:7).

In partaking of the Supper, Christians thank God for making them righteous through the faith of Jesus that moved Him to go to the cross. Christians, therefore, do not fail to celebrate the Supper as often as possible.

- **Rejoicing through mutual edification:** Disciples sing praises to God every day, but especially on the first day of the week they come together in order to encourage one another by teaching and admonishing one another through singing (Ep 5:19; Cl 3:16), the preaching and teaching of the word of God (2 Tm 4:2), praying (1 Th 5:17), and with planning and motivation to encourage one another to do good works (At 20:7; Hb 10:24,25). The assembly of the saints, therefore, exists among the disciples in order that each disciple has an opportunity to reconnect with other members.

- **Rejoicing in giving:**³³ Though Christians have the opportunity to individually give daily to special needs and evangelism, on the first day of the week they have the opportunity to contribute collectively to those who are in need and evangelists they have sent forth to preach the gospel (See Rm 10:14,15; 1 Co 16:1-3; 3 Jn 1-8).

Worship of God is not confined to a specific location, nor is it acted out through the performance of certain legal ceremonies. On the contrary, worship pours forth from a heart that is truly thankful to God for his or her righteous relationship with God because of the sacrificial offering of the Son of God.

“For all things [of the gospel] are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God” (2 Co 4:15).

Article 17

Christians Are Identified As A People Of Hope³⁴

We must never forget that Jesus is coming again in order to deliver His people out of this world and into a place of eternal dwelling (1 Th 4:13-18). We live in a world that often leads people emotionally into despair. But in the sanctuary of the *ekklesia* of Christ we have discovered the hope of the gospel that provides us with great comfort (See 2 Co 1:3-7). This is the exciting conquest that Christians have in this world. Therefore, in this way, *“the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus”* (Ph 4:7).

In order to be redeemed from the despair of this world before Jesus comes, one must be made righteous before God through the cross (At 20:28). Therefore, it is imperative that one join Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection in order to be received by Jesus when He appears again (Rm 6:3-6; 1 Co 12:13; Gl 3:26,27; 1 Th 4:13-18; 1 Jn 3:2). Whenever we discuss the subject of the church, therefore, we must not forget that church is the universal membership of people on earth who have responded by joining with the Son of God who came from heaven into our flesh. Christians, therefore, are all those throughout the world who have been born again by

joining with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection (Jn 3:3; 1 Co 12:12,13).

Group Review Discussion Questions

[After reading the text of this book, answer the following questions in a discussion group with others.]

1. Why is it such a daunting task to actualize a restoration of the gospel and the church of the New Testament in our times?
2. Why are our religious traditions so difficult to overcome or change in order to objectively study the gospel and church in the New Testament?
3. What can be our only road map to lead us back to the gospel and the church of the first century?
4. What should be our goal in restoring the truth of the gospel?
5. Why were those of the religion of Judaism so opposed to Jesus and the early disciples?
6. What does it reveal about ourselves when we refuse to rectify differences between the church to which we may now belong and the church we read about in the New Testament?
7. Why does any effort to restore New Testament Christianity inherently generate opposition?
8. Why do people find it comforting to remain in the bondage of religious traditions?
9. Why did Luke use the word *ekklesia* in Acts 5:11?
10. Why would we conclude that the church was established on the Pentecost of Acts 2?
11. Why was the church of Christ established upon the obedience of those who were baptized in the name of Christ on Pentecost?
12. Why is one a member of the church because of his or her obedient faith in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God?
13. Why is it important to first preach the gospel to unbelievers?
14. In the midst of so many confused religious groups today, why is it important to find concrete answers for the identity of the church?
15. What does it mean when the Holy Spirit said that we are not under a system of perfect law-keeping, but under grace?
16. Why is it a flawed system of religion to suppose that one is saved apart from grace, but by a legal system of law that is supposedly kept perfectly without any violations?
17. What was the result of the faith of Jesus Christ in reference to our righteousness?
18. Why does one's faith in his or her own ability to keep law perfectly cut one off from the righteousness of God?
19. Why does our supposed claim to be self-righteous cancel the righteousness of God that was revealed through Jesus?
20. Why does a zealous performance of religious rites and ceremonies during a Sunday assembly often reveal a sense of self-righteousness?

21. Why is it impossible for any person to be self-justified before God on the basis of law alone?
22. Why is grace marginalized when we use our worship as a means of self-justification?
23. Why is the *ekklesia* of Christ defined as people, and not by a specific location or performance of an order of ceremonies on Sunday morning?
24. According to John 13:34,35, how is the church identified in the communities in which the members live?
25. Why would the word *ekklesia* assume that individuals are **not** predestined to obey the gospel?
26. Why is the church a called out body of submitted subjects of the kingdom of Jesus?
27. Why are there no Christ-sent apostles today?
28. Why must the kingdom of Jesus be identified before we understand the nature of the church?
29. Why would a unique name of the disciples throughout the world encourage the disciples to function autonomously from one another?
30. What must one do in order to come into a covenant relationship with God?
31. If Jesus is the head of the body, then why can there never be a head of the church on earth?
32. Since there is no inherent authority by any person who accepts a King who has **all** authority, then what is the relationship between shepherds and the body?
33. What is the work of an evangelist?
34. What is meant when we identify the church as an organic body?
35. What is the present existence of Christ that makes it impossible for one's worship to be confined to either a particular location or time?
36. What is constitutional religion?

ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**