

An aerial photograph of Jerusalem's Old City, showing the extensive ruins of the Temple Mount. A prominent stone minaret with a crescent moon on top stands on the left. The foreground is filled with ancient stone foundations and walls, some with arches. In the background, modern buildings and a hazy cityscape are visible under a blue sky with light clouds.

RESTORING ORIGINAL CHRISTIANITY

Restoring Original Christianity

by Roderick C. Meredith

If Jesus of Nazareth were to return to the earth today, would He recognize the religion that is using His name? Not at all! Mankind has twisted Jesus Christ's teachings so that the religion bearing His name has practically **no** relationship to what He and the Apostles actually lived and believed.

Can you find a Church that strives to live by the original teachings of Christianity? Can you **prove** for yourself what God's Truth really is? This booklet will give you the all-important answers to those questions!

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If Jesus of Nazareth were to return to the earth today, would He recognize the religion that is using His name? Would He be shocked to find that people claiming to be His followers have been waging *war* against each other almost continually for the last 1,900 years—Catholic fighting Catholic, and Protestant fighting Protestant? That His professed followers believe doctrines *totally contrary* to what He taught, observing different days of worship, different customs and—most importantly—having a totally different concept of God and of His purpose than Jesus and the original Apostles did?

Jesus might wonder: “Why are they putting *My* name on all this “stuff”?”

Yet most genuine religious scholars recognize that *vast* changes have overtaken professing Christianity—rendering it totally different from the Christianity of Jesus and the Apostles! As respected mainline Protestant scholar Jesse Lyman Hurlbut acknowledges:

“For fifty years after St. Paul’s life a curtain hangs over the church, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about 120AD with the writings of the earliest church-fathers, we find a church in many aspects very different from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul” (*Story of the Christian Church*, p. 41).

If the leaders, during this time which Hurlbut elsewhere called an “age of shadows,” were filled with and led by God’s Spirit, then why

would the Church suddenly be “very different”? For the Bible tells us that Christ is “the *same* yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Yet the professing Christian church today is *not* even remotely the same as the one Jesus founded.

Describing the time period after all the original Apostles and their successors had died out, Hurlbut writes:

“The services of worship increased in splendor, but were less spiritual and hearty than those of former times. The forms and ceremonies of paganism gradually crept into the worship. Some of the old heathen feasts became church festivals with change of name and of worship. About 405^{AD} images of saints and martyrs began to appear in the churches, at first as memorials, then in succession revered, adored, and worshiped. The adoration of the Virgin Mary was substituted for the worship of Venus and Diana; the Lord’s supper became a sacrifice in place of a memorial; and the elder evolved from a preacher into a priest” (p. 79).

Notice Hurlbut’s statement that “some of the old heathen feasts became church festivals.” They “became” that way because God Himself had predicted that *evil* men and false leaders would take over most of the Church! Remember this inspired warning the Apostle Paul gave the Ephesian elders: “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” (Acts 20:29–31).

When Paul realized the depth of the *apostasy* that would overtake most of the Church, it hit him emotionally. He then “did not cease to *warn* everyone night and day with tears”! Very few people today seem to be concerned enough about this massive apostasy to even begin to shed tears over this awesome change.

HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN?

This massive apostasy occurred because men and women back then, just like today, did not zealously *prove* to themselves where God’s Truth was being taught. That is why the living Christ corrected those

Christians living near the end of the Apostolic Era: “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent” (Revelation 2:4–5).

And what about today? How can we account for the more than 400 different denominations and sects—all calling themselves “Christian”? And all of them having some type of different ideas, traditions and approaches and yet claiming to follow the same Jesus Christ?

Part of the answer is the fact that *extremely few* professing Christians really study their Bibles! So they do not “*prove*” virtually anything they believe by carefully researching it in the Bible! Oh, they may enthusiastically study books and articles on health, on self-improvement or on investing and making more money. But somehow it does *not* occur to them to thoroughly study the most *vital* subjects of all: *Is there a real God? If so, what is His purpose in creating human beings? And how can we fulfill that purpose?* Yet the Bible commands: “*Prove* all things, hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21, KJV).

Most people have just “accepted” the religion passed down through their families. Most have just “gone along” with the beliefs and the traditions taught to them as children. Noting the public’s lack of attention to their religion, *Los Angeles Times* religion writer Teresa Watanabe reported:

“According to one religious research firm, two-thirds of Americans don’t regularly read the Bible or know the names of the Four Gospels. More than half of Americans surveyed can’t name even five of the Ten Commandments. And the majority say they find the Good Book irrelevant.... ‘We still hold the Bible in high regard, but in terms of actually spending the time reading it, studying it and applying it—that is a thing of the past,’ said George Barna. The reasons cited range from changes in American culture to the intrinsic difficulty of the text itself.

Now religious organizations are making a major effort to jazz up the ancient Scripture’s doddering image. Bible publishers are producing a dizzying array of products, with translations and editions pitched to every conceivable niche

market, to convince people that the book is neither arcane nor irrelevant” (*Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1999).

Of course, the real underlying cause of this massive religious apostasy is that this is Satan’s world and that he has totally *deceived* the vast majority of humanity. In the comfortable surroundings of western civilization, most Americans, Canadians and others fail to realize that the *overwhelming majority* of human beings have never believed in *any* form of “Christianity”—let alone the real Christianity of Christ and the Apostles! The vast majority of humans are—and *always have been*—Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Shintoists, atheists or agnostics.

A VERY REAL SATAN IS INVOLVED

If you will study and believe your own Bible, you will find that Satan the devil is described as the one “who deceives the *whole* world” (Revelation 12:9). You will also find Satan referred to as “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). For Satan “broadcasts” a selfish, rebellious attitude throughout this earth. He is the one who is influencing deceived men into injecting *enormous* amounts of licentious sex, violence and a general spirit of disrespect and lawlessness into the so-called “entertainment” you and your children see or hear on television, at the movies, on the radio or when playing various kinds of perverted computer games which simulate almost indescribable acts of perversion or violence. Do you know who is really laughing at all this “fun stuff”? *Satan is!*

For by perverting mankind’s normal interest in sex and excitement, and by cleverly injecting sick humor into so many of television’s “situation comedies,” Satan is able to cleverly mislead mankind into abusing, degrading and ultimately *destroying* itself if God does not intervene at the last minute to stop it (Matthew 24:21–22). Satan is truly the “god” of this present world! The Apostle Paul was inspired to write, “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the *god* of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:3–4).

Most important of all, Satan has injected into mainstream “Christianity” a whole series of totally *false* ideas about the origin and destiny of man, of what God is like, of what God’s awesome *purpose* is, and how we are to achieve that great purpose. Additionally, Satan

has confused people about prophecy so much that most professing Christians and even most professing Christian ministers and priests simply throw up their hands and almost totally neglect biblical prophecy. Yet our Creator devotes about one-fourth of the entire Bible to the “*sure* word of prophecy” (2 Peter 1:19, KJV).

Have you ever looked at traditional Christianity and asked yourself: “*Is this religion really based on the Bible? Is this the religion founded by Jesus Christ and taught by His Apostles?*” If Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, then his life should be an example for His followers. But *practically no one* actually *follows* His example!

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT CHRIST?

Instead, mankind has made its own religion that is *almost completely different* from what Jesus Christ preached and practiced. And they call that religion “Christianity,” as if it were connected with Jesus Christ! As the philosopher and theologian Soren Kirkegaard put it:

“The Christianity of the New Testament simply does not exist... what has to be done is to throw light upon a criminal offense against Christianity prolonged through centuries, perpetrated by millions (more or less guiltily), whereby they have cunningly, under the guise of perfecting Christianity, sought little by little to cheat God out of Christianity and have succeeded in making Christianity exactly the opposite of what it is in the New Testament” (*Attack Upon Christendom*, Kirkegaard, 1956, pp. 32–33).

Those are strong words, but they are hardly unique. Professor Rufus M. Jones concurs, noting how Christ’s true teachings were quickly detached from the religion bearing His name:

“If by any chance Christ Himself had been taken by His later followers as the model and pattern of the new way, and a serious attempt had been made to set up His life and teaching as the standard and norm for the Church, Christianity would have been something *vastly different* from what it became. Then ‘heresy’ would have been as it is not now, deviation from His way, His teaching, His spirit, His kingdom.... What we may properly call ‘Galilean Christianity’ had a short life,

though there have been notable attempts to revive it and make it live again, and here and there spiritual prophets have insisted that anything else other than this simple Galilean religion is 'heresy'; but the main line of historic development has taken a different course and has marked the emphasis very differently" (*The Church's Debt to Heretics*, Jones, 1924, pp. 15–16).

We should not be surprised that mankind tried to remake Christianity its own way. Mankind has tried for thousands of years to find its own way. Humanism, materialism, socialism, communism or capitalism—human society has invented so many philosophies in the *vain* hope of giving meaning to life without God, and creating through human effort a happy and prosperous society on the earth.

The truth is clear. Modern "Christianity" *has become "vastly different"*—as Professor Jones wrote—from the Christianity of Christ! But what has been the result? Nations are almost constantly at war with each other, the rich prosper while the poor starve and disease runs rampant. "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation," wrote Henry David Thoreau. He was *right!* But neither Thoreau nor most of mankind have had their eyes opened to the solution, the *Truth* that would fill their lives with meaning and joy and peace.

Some might say, "So what?" But this is no small matter we are talking about. Frankly, we are talking about the way to eternal *life* on the one hand, or eternal *death* on the other (Romans 6:23). For if you do not have the Christianity of Christ, *you have no Christianity whatsoever!*

Jesus Himself warned, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21–23). It is important to realize that Christ will say to those failing to do the "will" of the Father: "*I never knew you.*" In plain language, these deceived churchgoers will be told that they were, in fact, never acquainted with the Christ they claim to serve. They were never really converted. *They were never really "Christian"!*

Again, Jesus said, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). A "lord" or "master" is someone you *obey*. But most professing Christian ministers and their

followers do *not* follow the clear teachings and examples of Jesus and the Apostles. And most of them do not even bother to deeply study their Bibles to find what those teachings and examples are!

RESTORING ORIGINAL CHRISTIANITY

The key issue, then, is our desire and willingness to get back to the true Christian faith, “the faith which was *once for all* delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Are you willing to genuinely try to follow the Christianity of Christ? Or are you willing to “take a chance” in your relationship with God and in your quest for eternal life?

Frankly, the “little flock” (Luke 12:32)—the true Church of God—has always understood the need to pattern itself after the teachings and examples of Christ and the Apostles. Although very few have seriously attempted to follow this pattern, many scholars and religious historians have understood the concept of the “Jerusalem Church of God.” This is a vital concept to understand if we are sincerely interested in contending “for the faith once delivered.”

The Apostle Paul was inspired to write to the Thessalonians, “For you, brethren, became *imitators* of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 2:14). The book of Acts makes it clear that the earthly “headquarters” Church of God—for many decades—was the Jerusalem Church. It was here that the Holy Spirit was originally poured out on the true Christians (Acts 2). It was here where Peter, James and John carried on most of their ministry for many years (cf. Acts 4:1; 8:1; 11:1–2). Later, it was to the leadership at Jerusalem that Paul and Barnabas came to settle the major question of circumcision for the Gentiles and related questions (Acts 15:4–6).

As renowned historian Edward Gibbon wrote: “The first fifteen bishops of Jerusalem were all circumcised Jews; and the congregation over which they presided united the law of Moses with the doctrine of Christ. It was natural that the primitive tradition of a church which was founded only forty days after the death of Christ, and was governed almost as many years under the immediate inspection of his apostle, should be received as the standard of orthodoxy. The distant churches very frequently appealed to the authority of their venerable Parent” (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chap. 15, sec. 1, p. 389).

As indicated above, the only major ministerial conference indicated in the New Testament was held at Jerusalem. Here lived the leading original Apostles. Here was the true “mother” church (*not* Rome!).

And it was to Jerusalem Paul and Barnabas had come even earlier, lest, as Paul had put it, “I might run, or had run, in *vain*” (Galatians 2:1–2).

After the major Jerusalem conference, Paul and Silas traveled through Asia Minor visiting the churches: “And as they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders *at Jerusalem*” (Acts 16:4).

PAUL LOOKED TO JERUSALEM

Clearly the original Apostles and the Jerusalem Church of God set the inspired “pattern” for true Christianity—*not* just for that time—but for *all* time! Contrary to the heretical Protestant ideas that the Apostle Paul later was used by God to “reinvent” Christianity, the real Apostle Paul of the Bible—as we have seen—constantly showed deep respect for the original Apostles and deferred to the leadership at Jerusalem in all major matters! And it was the Apostle Paul who wrote the primarily Gentile church at Corinth: “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters” (1 Corinthians 7:19). Noted historian Carl von Weiszäcker wrote in 1895:

“Paul was far from confining his interest to the Gentile Christian Church which he had himself founded. His thoughts were much too lofty to leave Jewish Christianity to itself. He toiled not merely for his own work, but for the Church of God... the whole Church. He never forgot for a moment the true birthplace of the gospel. And for him the Christians in Jerusalem were always the [saints].... He did not however merely entertain a grand policy of ecclesiastical union, but his first and constant thought was that the primitive Church was the foremost divine institution under the Gospel.... In the early Apostles he saw... the Apostles of the Lord. From them the testimony of the Resurrection emanated (1 Corinthians 15:1 ff.). They were ever the apostles, whom God had placed at the head of His Church, the first of those divinely commissioned men who held the leading office in the Body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:28) (*The Apostolic Age of the Christian Church*, pp. 12–13).

Later in Paul’s ministry, he traveled again to Jerusalem: “And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the

following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present” (Acts 21:17–18). Notice that Paul presented himself to James, the Lord’s brother, who by now was undoubtedly the chief Apostle at Jerusalem—Peter probably having gone to the “lost sheep” of the house of Israel in northwest Europe and the British Isles.

After rejoicing in the good news Paul brought about God’s Work among the Gentiles, the Jerusalem leadership told Paul: “You see, brother, how many *myriads* of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law” (v. 20). The term “myriad” literally means “tens of thousands.” So as not to confuse or discourage these many Jewish Christians, Paul was asked by the Jerusalem Church to go through an offering ceremony to publicly demonstrate that he was *not* teaching in any way against God’s laws. The Jerusalem leaders exhorted Paul: “Take these men along and be purified with them and pay all the expenses connected with the shaving of their heads. This will let everyone know there is no truth in the reports they have heard about you and that you still *regularly* observe the Law” (v. 24, *Jerusalem Bible*).

If Paul had in fact been teaching against God’s Law in *any* way—especially the *spiritual law* containing the Ten Commandments—he most certainly would *not* have gone through this ceremony of the law of Moses! That particular ceremony—probably a thanks offering at the conclusion of the Nazarite vow—was *not* necessary for a New Testament Christian. But it was not “sinful” either! And Paul’s deep respect for God’s Law, for the original mother church and the pattern of *obedience* to God’s Law—all this guided Paul in his decision to go ahead and participate in this ceremony. By guiding Paul in this—and putting this example in the Bible—God is showing *all* of us that Paul’s approach was one of *obedience* to law, *not* one who tried to do away with or “reason around” God’s spiritual laws as so many Protestant theologians teach!

WHAT DID CHRIST DO ON EARTH?

Nearly all professing Christians understand that in order to be an acceptable sacrifice for mankind’s sins, Jesus Christ had to keep the Law perfectly. But what law did He keep, and what did He expect of His followers? Here is how Christ Himself described His mission:

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly,

I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17–20).

Many Christians do not grasp the importance of those words. Christ said that not “one jot or one tittle” (the tiniest marks in the Hebrew script) of the law would pass from the law until heaven and earth pass away. Since heaven and earth have not passed away, we must understand that the law remains. And Christ condemned those who would falsely teach men to break even the “least of these commandments.” Rather, He explained that those who both *do* and *teach* the commandments will be called “*great*” in the kingdom of heaven!

Did His “fulfilling” the law somehow change these commands? Or did they change after Christ’s resurrection? No! Heaven and earth did not pass away at His resurrection. And we must understand what He meant when He said that he would “fulfill” the law. One scholar explains His words as follows:

“Did [Jesus] fill or fulfill the [Law]? The common word *plerôsai* means ‘to fill.’ At [Matthew] 5:17 most translations render it ‘to fulfill.’ The theological implications often drawn are that [Jesus] fulfilled all the prophecies of the [Old Testament] pertaining to the Jews, so that none remain for them now; and that he kept the [Law] perfectly, so that no one need obey it today. But these conclusions do not follow logically, and in fact they contradict [Jesus’] immediately preceding statement that he did not come to abolish (or destroy) the [Law]. More fundamental for translation, however, is the question of whether *plerôsai* in this verse should be rendered ‘to fulfill’ at all. [This] translator’s view is that [Jesus] came to fill the [Law] and the ethical pronouncements of the Prophets full with their complete meaning, so that everyone can know all that obedience entails. For this reason the *Jewish New Testament* says that [Jesus] came ‘not to abolish but to complete.’ In fact,

this is the subject of the entire Sermon on the Mount; and [Matthew] 5:17, understood in this way, is its theme sentence” (*Jewish New Testament*, Stern, 1995, pp. xxii–xxiii).

In other words, Jesus came, as Isaiah prophesied (Isaiah 42:21), to “magnify” God’s law and to show its fullest *intent* and *purpose*. What Jesus Christ sought to abolish were the abuses of the law, and the man-made traditions that perverted the law. His sacrificial death, foreshadowed by the temple sacrifices, made those animal sacrifices and washings irrelevant for Christians. But His life showed that the *spiritual* law—the Ten Commandments—*was and would remain* relevant for those seeking to obey Him. One cannot properly understand His teachings without understanding the Old Testament scriptures and the law they contain, as noted by Frederick Holmgren:

“The Old Testament brings gifts to the Christian tradition. One of those gifts is the Torah (the Law)... Jesus embraced the Torah of Moses; he came not to end it but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17)—to carry its teachings forward. Further, to those who came to him seeking eternal life, he held it up as the essential teaching to be observed (Luke 10:25–28). Despite Jesus’ conflict with some interpreters of his day, both Jewish and Christian scholars see him as one who honored and followed the Law. When Jesus proclaims the coming rule of God, he speaks nowhere in detail about the inner character of this rule. He does not need to because that has already been described in the Old Testament... The Old Testament is not an antiquated Scripture; its life-giving teachings are needed by the church” (Frederick C. Holmgren, “Preaching the Gospel Without Anti-Judaism,” *Removing Anti-Judaism from the Pulpit*, ed. Howard Clark Kee and Irvin J. Borowski, 1996, pp. 72–73).

Indeed, Jesus Christ taught from the Old Testament, and He lived by it, as did His followers.

WHAT DID THE APOSTLES TEACH?

We have seen that Jesus Christ plainly upheld God’s law. Yet some churches falsely accuse the Apostles—especially the Apostle Paul—of teaching that Christians need no longer follow Jesus Christ’s example.

Indeed, even in the first century AD we see that some were twisting Paul's words for their purposes (cf. 2 Peter 3:16). Yet when writing to the young evangelist Timothy, Paul plainly reminded him "that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:15–16).

When Timothy was a child, the "Holy Scriptures" he knew were the Old Testament scriptures. Most of the New Testament books did not yet exist! Paul says that these Old Testament scriptures are "able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Paul saw no conflict between Old Testament scripture and Christian faith and practice, and confirmed that *all* Scripture (including the Old Testament) is profitable for *doctrine* and for *instruction in righteousness*. These are not the words of someone teaching that the God's Old Testament laws have been done away!

The Apostle Paul instructed Christians: "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). The Apostle John observed: "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

These two, like all the Apostles, knew that Jesus Christ came to show the perfect *example*, and that Christians *ought to follow His example*, strengthened by the Holy Spirit. This was the commonplace understanding in the Apostle Paul's day, as Christianity spread across the Roman Empire.

"Everywhere, especially in the East of the Roman Empire, there would be Jewish Christians whose outward way of life would not be markedly different from that of the Jews. They took for granted that the gospel was continuous with [the religion of Moses]; for them the New Covenant, which Jesus had set up at the Last Supper with His disciples... did not mean that the covenant made between God and Israel was no longer in force. They still observed the feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles; they also continued to be circumcised, to keep the weekly Sabbath and the Mosaic regulations concerning food. According to some scholars, they must have been so strong that right up to the fall of Jerusalem in AD70 they were the dominant element in the Christian movement" (*Judeo-*

christianisme, “Paul and Jewish Christianity,” Davies, 1972, p. 72, quoted in Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, p. 151).

So for about the first 40 *years* of Christianity, guided by the Holy Spirit, the “dominant element” in the Church of God was still following Christ’s example of keeping the weekly and annual Sabbaths commanded by God. They were still following the example set by the Jerusalem Church of God!

Who *dared* to change all of that?

As we have seen, it was *not* the Apostle Paul. It was certainly *not* any of the original 12 Apostles. Rather, as the time period—which is fittingly called the “Dark Ages”—began to get underway, misguided false religious leaders began to change virtually *everything* that had made the Christian religion totally different from the pagan cults of the Roman Empire.

Some wrongly teach that after Jerusalem fell and the Temple was destroyed in 70^{AD}, Christians were no longer to keep the law as had Jesus Christ and the Apostles. So it is important to note that the Apostle John, the last surviving Apostle, wrote the book of Revelation *after* the Temple was destroyed. And in that book, he upheld the law of God! “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Revelation 22:14). John heard these words from God, and knew the importance of obeying Him: “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations” (Revelation 2:26). Clearly, Christians were keeping the law, living just as Jesus Christ did, long after the Temple was destroyed! Scholars concur. “The first Christians continued to observe the Jewish festivals [the biblically-taught festivals], though in a new spirit, as commemorations of events which those festivals had foreshadowed” (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. 8, p. 828).

WHAT WAS FIRST-CENTURY CHRISTIANITY LIKE?

Most professing Christians today have *no idea* what first-century Christianity was really like! Yet for decades—*long* after Christ’s death and resurrection and the disciples’ reception of the Holy Spirit—the true Christians all believed and practiced a way of life and worship *totally different* from professing Christianity today!

How was it different?

As we saw earlier from Professor Davies, the early Christians “took for granted that the gospel was continuous with [the religion

of Moses]; for them the New Covenant, which Jesus had set up at the Last Supper with His disciples... did not mean that the covenant made between God and Israel was no longer in force. They still observed the feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles; they also continued to be circumcised, to keep the weekly Sabbath and the Mosaic regulations concerning food.”

Subtly, but surely, Satan the devil has deceived most of today’s professing ministers into believing that Christianity was a “brand new religion”—seemingly *cut off* from the Old Testament and the teaching God gave through Moses. And although some may not be consciously aware of it, a definite *anti*-Jewish bias crept into early Christianity and has *continued to this day!*

But the biblical and historical facts show that Christianity was a continuation—an enlargement and “magnification” of the teachings God gave through Moses—*not* something brand new! As the Apostle Paul was inspired in the *New Testament* to explain to the Gentile Christians at Ephesus: “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the *foundation* of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:19–20). So a basic part of the very “foundation” of Christianity was the writings and teachings of the Old Testament prophets—those writings which Christ and the Apostles referred to as “Scripture” again and again!

For Jesus Christ was a circumcised *Jew* (Luke 2:21–22; Hebrews 7:14). It was Jesus’ “custom” to keep the seventh-day Sabbath—right along with the other Jews (Luke 4:16). Far from abrogating God’s Sabbath, Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for “man”—*not* just the Jews, and that *He* was “Lord” of the Sabbath. So the Sabbath is, in fact, the true “Lord’s Day” as far as a day of rest and worship is concerned!

Long after the crucifixion, it was the Apostle Paul’s “custom” also to keep the seventh-day Sabbath (Acts 17:2). We also find Paul observing the annual biblical festivals such as Pentecost (1 Corinthians 16:8), Passover and Unleavened Bread (1 Corinthians 5:7–8) and other festivals.

The true Church of God—*named* “Church of God” *12 times* in the *New Testament*—was itself started on the Day of Pentecost, one of the seven annual Sabbaths God gave Israel. At His second coming, Christ Himself will return at the “seventh trump” (Revelation 11:15)—pictured by the Feast of Trumpets, another one of the biblical Holy

Days. And the Living Jesus Christ, who inspired the entire Bible, also inspired His servant Zechariah to explain that after Christ's second coming the *whole world* will be observing the Feast of Tabernacles! (read carefully the entire 14th chapter of Zechariah). Also, during the soon-coming Millennial reign of Christ, Isaiah tells us, "And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one *Sabbath* to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,' says the LORD" (Isaiah 66:23).

So true Christians who observe the biblical Sabbaths and biblical festivals are, in fact, "pioneers." They are not only following the "pattern" of the original Christianity taught and practiced by Jesus Christ; they are "pioneering" the *Way of life* which *all* nations will soon be learning in tomorrow's world!

For example, the seventh-day Sabbath pictures the reign of Christ during the coming seventh millennium of human history. It is the "rest" which God commanded from the beginning (Hebrews 4:4). That is why Paul was inspired to write, "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God" (v. 9). It is important to realize that the Greek word here translated "rest" is *sabbatismos*—the "keeping of a Sabbath"—whereas *katapausin* is the normal Greek word for taking rest and is the word used throughout the rest of Hebrews 4.

Incidentally, if you would like full, documented *proof* that Christians today should keep the biblical Sabbath, then write for our powerful and absolutely vital booklet, *Which Day is the Christian Sabbath?* It will be sent to you at no charge upon your request. Just write or call us at the address nearest you listed at the end of this booklet.

God's Sabbath and His annual Holy Days picture His great *Plan*. But true Christianity, of course, involves far more than keeping the biblical Sabbaths. As we have already intimated, it involves an entire *Way of life* based on Jesus' example and His teaching, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every* Word of God" (Luke 4:4).

JESUS MAGNIFIED GOD'S LAW

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus certainly did *not* "do away" with God's spiritual law (Matthew 5:17). Rather, He "magnified" the Ten Commandments. He explained that we must not only refrain from killing other human beings, we must not even look on them with contempt or hatred (vv. 20–23), as that is the "spirit" of *murder*. We are *not* to "hate" even our enemies. As Jesus said clearly: "But I say to

you, *love* your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (v. 44).

We are *never* to commit adultery. But, as Jesus clearly said: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever *looks* at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (vv. 27–28).

The early Christians were taught that they should *give* in a very private manner—*not* showing off, or having a big “foundation” in their own name to perpetuate *their* honor in the giving (Matthew 6:1–4). True Christians were to *pray regularly* and *privately*—*not* showing off their oratorical skills before men or using certain words or phrases over and over in “vain repetition” (vv. 5–13). And true Christians certainly would *fast* regularly (vv. 16–18), following biblical examples of doing without food and water in order to humble the self and get closer to the invisible God as Jesus did (Matthew 4), Moses did (Deuteronomy 9:9, 18) and the Apostle Paul did (Acts 9:9).

In our materialistic age, we need to understand that the *original* Christians did not allow themselves to be overcome by the desires for money, or material things as most professing Christians do today (Matthew 6:19–20). As Jesus later warned His followers: “Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22). Rather, as the book of Acts explains: “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common” (Acts 4:32).

First century Christianity was squarely based on the teachings of the “law and prophets”—except for those animal sacrifices and washings which pre-figured the sacrifice of Christ and the cleansing of the Holy Spirit. These sacrifices and washings were made obsolete (Hebrews 9:9–12). But the *spiritual laws* of God were *never* done away. Rather, as Jesus’ beloved disciple John was inspired to write: “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the *commandments* of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).

A VIEW OF FIRST-CENTURY CHRISTIANITY

If you could somehow “look in on” true Christianity during the first century and even beyond, what would you see? You would see

a group of dedicated believers in Jesus as the promised Messiah. You would see a community of believers to whom the God of Israel, the God of Creation, was *real*. For these people would not just talk about the *person* of Jesus Christ. They would *do what He commanded*.

With Christ living in them through the promised Holy Spirit, they would keep *all ten* of the Ten Commandments as a *way of life*. As they learned to “*grow* in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18), there would be in their community *no crime*—no murder, rape, robbery or assault. No fornication or adultery. And except in rare incidents of sexual misconduct, there would be no divorce and remarriage (Matthew 5:32). Obviously, such Christians would have in their society *no* pornography and *no* gross sex and violence of *any* kind in their “entertainment”—whether in books, plays, or (among today’s Christians) television, movies, computer games or the Internet. Rather, all these dedicated, wholesome families would be *obeying* their “Lord,” not just using His name while they contradicted by their lifestyle everything He taught (Luke 6:46). They would be resting and worshiping God on the *seventh-day* Sabbath as He commanded—constantly being reminded by this biblical day of worship that the *true* God is the *Creator* of all that is (Exodus 20:8–11).

True Christians, for instance, would *never* be found fighting or butchering their fellow Christians—as has happened over and over again in the last few centuries in France, Belgium, Germany and Italy. In first century Christianity, the members of God’s Church *never* prayed to dead, so-called “saints” or to idols. They *never* worshiped the Virgin Mary. Of course, they understood that as a normal wife, Mary had *at least six* other children by her husband after Jesus’ supernatural birth had taken place (Matthew 13:55–56).

In first century Christianity, the dedicated ministers and elders in the Church of God were primarily husbands and fathers (1 Timothy 3:1–5; Titus 1:5–9). They were taught that in “latter times” some would be *deceived* by “doctrines of demons” into thinking it was wrong for men—certainly including ministers or priests—to marry (1 Timothy 4:1–3). Meeting regularly in plain surroundings on the day God made holy, *His* Sabbath, God’s ministers were instructed: “Preach the *word!* Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and

they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to *fables*” (2 Timothy 4:2–4).

Indeed, as we have seen, mankind has been turned aside to “fables.” Today, in dark, dank, foreboding cathedrals, priests and ministers in strange-looking “Mother Hubbard” gowns go through incomprehensible rituals, chant prayers and responsive readings—and expound the Bible itself very seldom. They have *very little* to say about the *way of life* which Christ and the Apostles taught or about the one-fourth of the Bible which was *prophetic*, or about the true *purpose* which God is working out here on earth.

As the New Testament makes plain, first century Christians would be “feeding on Christ” (John 6:57) by constant *study* of the Bible. Remember God’s description of the Bereans? “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and *searched the Scriptures daily* to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

First century Christians, then, would be trying sincerely, with God’s promised help, to *live* by every Word of God. They would be following Christ’s example of obedience to God’s laws—*not* the ways, the rituals or the religious festivals learned from the pagans around them.

Again, they would not only believe in the *person* of Jesus Christ, but they would *believe* and *practice* what He taught: “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My *word*; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” (John 14:23). And they would believe what the Apostle John wrote near the end of the Apostolic Age: “Therefore let that abide in you which you heard *from the beginning*. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father” (1 John 2:24).

Most first century Christians would have deeply understood the fundamental teaching of the Apostle Paul: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ *liveth* in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, KJV). The Bible makes it clear that “Jesus Christ is the *same* yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

So true Christians—*through Christ living in them*—would be *obeying* the Ten Commandments as Jesus did, keeping the seventh-day Sabbath and biblical Holy Days as Jesus did and following the entire *way of life* modeled by Jesus Christ and the original Apostles whom He taught. As they worshiped together, sang together and *served* one another, they would have been filled with *love*—with worship and

adoration toward the Great God, and with kindness and out-flowing concern toward one another.

For Christ would be living within them His loving, serving and obedient life. And they would be filled with and led by God's Spirit (Romans 8:14). That very love of God flows down the riverbed of the Ten Commandments. As Jesus' beloved Apostle explains: "For this is the *love* of God, that we *keep his commandments*. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

HOW WAS THE TRUTH LOST?

Some teach that their denomination was given the authority to change Christ's teachings, and that by this authority its members need no longer obey Christ's commandments or follow His example. The largest professing Christian sect calls itself "universal" and claims to trace its human leadership back to the Apostle Peter—from whom it claims the authority to change biblical doctrines, even though Peter himself never did so.

Sincere members of that church would be shocked to learn that many of those who today call themselves Christians can trace their faith not to Peter, but to Simon Magus, mentioned in Acts 8! This Simon Magus was at the heart of the apostasy that turned much of the first-century Church away from Christ's teachings.

Scripture recounts that all of Samaria gave heed to Simon Magus as someone great, calling him "the great power of God" (Acts 8:9–10). That phrase represents Simon's "claim to be the bearer of divine revelation" (*The New Testament Environment*, Lohse, p. 269). Simon received baptism and became a nominal Christian, but the Apostle Peter recognized Simon as being "poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity" (Acts 8:23). Simon's Samaritan religion was also greatly influenced by Greek philosophy, and early Christian writers reviled him. *Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity* notes: "Early Christian writers regarded Simon as the fount of all heresies" (p. 100). The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th ed.) in its article on Simon Magus identifies him as the "founder of a school of Gnostics and as a father of heresy." Noted historian Edward Gibbon says the Gnostics "blended with the faith of Christ many sublime but obscure tenets which they derived from oriental philosophy" (*The Triumph of Christendom in the Roman Empire*, p. 15).

Simon Magus and others sought to create a syncretistic faith, mixing popular devotions with their philosophies, and adding a covering of

Restoring Original Christianity

Christ's words, to create a religion that could win mass acceptance. As noted historian Will Durant wrote:

“Christianity did not destroy paganism; it adopted it. The Greek mind, dying, came to a transmigrated life in the theology and liturgy of the Church; the Greek language, having reigned for centuries over philosophy, became the vehicle of Christian literature and ritual; the Greek mysteries passed down into the impressive mystery of the Mass. Other pagan cultures contributed to the syncretist result. From Egypt came the ideas of a divine trinity... and a personal immortality of reward and punishment; from Egypt the adoration of the Mother and Child, and the mystic theosophy that made Neoplatonism and Gnosticism, and obscured the Christian creed; there, too, Christian monasticism would find its exemplars and its source. From Phrygia came the worship of the Great Mother; from Syria the resurrection drama of Adonis; from Thrace, perhaps, the cult of Dionysus, the dying and saving god.... The Mithraic ritual so closely resembled the eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass that Christian fathers charged the Devil with inventing these similarities to mislead frail minds. Christianity was the last great creation of the ancient pagan world.... [The Eucharist] was a conception long sanctified by time; the pagan mind needed no schooling to receive it; by embodying the ‘mystery of the Mass,’ Christianity became the last and greatest of the mystery religions” (*The Story of Civilization*, Vol. 5, Durant, pp. 595, 599).

In the fourth century after Christ, the Roman emperor Constantine adopted Christianity as his religion. More properly, one might say that he “adapted” it, since what went by the name of “Christianity” was *dramatically* transformed under his imperial influence.

Under Constantine's direction, the Council of Nicaea was held in 325AD. Though he had not yet been baptized, Constantine presided over the council's opening session and took part in its discussions, believing that it was his duty as emperor to oversee the establishment of doctrine for the church. But was Constantine presiding over the council as a former pagan now turned Christian, or did he use the Council of Nicaea to infuse his pagan background into what would become “official” Christianity? Respected historian Paul Johnson has observed the following regarding Constantine's religious views:

“There is some doubt about the magnitude of Constantine’s change of ideas.... He himself appears to have been a sun-worshipper, one of a number of late-pagan cults which had observances in common with the Christians. Thus the followers of Isis adored a madonna nursing her holy child; the cult of Attis and Cybele celebrated a day of blood and fasting, followed by the Hilaria resurrection-feast, a day of joy, on 25 March; the elitist Mithraics, many of whom were senior army officers, ate a sacred meal. Constantine was almost certainly a Mithraic, and his triumphal arch, built after his ‘conversion,’ testifies to the Sun-god, or ‘unconquered sun.’ Many Christians did not make a clear distinction between this sun-cult and their own. They referred to Christ ‘driving his chariot across the sky,’ they held their services on Sunday, knelt towards the East and had their nativity-feast on 25 December, the birthday of the sun at the winter solstice. During the later pagan revival under the Emperor Julian many Christians found it easy to apostatize because of this confusion; the Bishop of Troy told Julian he had always prayed secretly to the sun. Constantine never abandoned sun-worship and kept the sun on his coins. He made Sunday into a day of rest....” (*A History of Christianity*, Johnson, 1976, pp. 67–69).

If you read the above historical quotes carefully, you will understand that—during the appropriately named “Dark Ages”—nearly all the aspects of *paganism* were introduced into professing Christianity. False concepts of the “mystery of the mass,” the *worship* of the Virgin Mary patterned *directly* after the worship of the pagan goddesses, the idea of a “little Lord Jesus” being born on December 25, calling it “Christmas” and connecting it with all the pagan rituals of the Saturnalia—all these *false* concepts and more were woven into what became “mainstream” Christianity.

Centuries later, the Protestant “reformers” were able to see a *few* of the problems of this Roman religion. But most of these pagan concepts were so thoroughly inculcated into their minds that the reformers made only a very few “surface” changes.

THE “REFORMATION” REFORMED VERY LITTLE

Martin Luther—the “father” of the Reformation—and other reformers still held hostile attitudes against all things “Jewish,”

including the Sabbath of Jesus Christ, the annual festivals and, in fact, literal obedience to the Ten Commandments. That is one reason Martin Luther presumptuously added something to God's own Word! In Luther's translation of the New Testament, he deliberately added the word "alone" to Romans 3:28. Luther was so adamant against the necessity of obeying God's law—confusing it perhaps with Catholic canon law and Catholic rituals—that *he added a word to God's inspired revelation!*

Romans 3:28 in the *New King James Version* reads: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." Luther added the word "alone" (*sola* in Latin) so that in his German-language New Testament the phrase became "justified by faith alone"—a plainly wrong change without support in the text. When one critic raised an objection to his changing Scripture, Luther haughtily replied: "Should your Pope give himself any useless annoyance about the word *sola*, you may promptly reply: 'It is the will of Dr. Martin Luther that it should be so.'" (John Alzog, *Manual of Universal Church History*, Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, 1902, p. 199). And, we may add on good authority, no other reason for such unscriptural changes as these was ever given. When it came to Luther's own personal doctrinal convictions, Martin Luther was truly a *self-willed* man.

His third tractate of 1520, *On Christian Liberty*, asserts that a Christian man is spiritually *subject to no man or to any law*. He contended that since we are justified by *faith alone*, we are no longer under obligation to keep the law of God.

And, as is well known, Luther called the book of James an "epistle of straw" because James clearly taught the necessity of obedience to the Ten Commandments! Notice James 2:10–12: "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. *So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.*"

It is exceedingly clear in this passage of inspired Scripture that James is talking about the ten "points" of the Ten Commandments. He tells Christians to keep the *whole* law. James then concludes by teaching New Testament Christians to "speak and to *do*" as those who will be *judged* by God's law.

So although often sincere, the Protestant reformers carried over most of the anti-law, anti-obedience attitudes they had come to adopt

in their rebellion against “Mother Rome.” Yet, like Rome, they were still involved in a paganized system of false doctrines, wrong Holy Days and false concepts of God, which God Himself describes in Revelation 17:4–5: “The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”

As this form of “Christianity” became the state religion, masses of former pagans “converted.” Many did so out of convenience rather than conviction, and kept their old beliefs privately. Others came to the new syncretistic faith uneducated in its beliefs, and able to receive only the most basic instruction.

A PAGANIZED “CHRISTIANITY”

The church gained from Constantine and the Empire not just new doctrines, but new organization. Rome had a long-standing imperial cult, and its practices found a home in this compromised Christianity. Will Durant observes:

“Christianity... grew by the absorption of pagan faith and ritual; it became a triumphant Church by inheriting the organizing patterns and genius of Rome.... As Judea had given Christianity ethics, and Greece had given it theology, so now Rome gave it organization; all these, with a dozen absorbed and rival faiths, entered into the Christian synthesis. It was not merely that the Church took over some religious customs and forms common in pre-Christian Rome—the stole and other vestments of pagan priests, the use of incense and holy water in purifications, the burning of candles and an everlasting light before the altar, the worship of the saints, the architecture of the basilica, the law of Rome as a basis for canon law, the title of Pontifex Maximus for the Supreme Pontiff, and, in the fourth century, the Latin language as the noble and enduring vehicle of Catholic ritual. The Roman gift was above all a vast framework of government, which, as secular authority failed, became the structure of ecclesiastical rule. Soon the bishops, rather than the Roman prefects, would be the source of order and the seat of power in the cities; the metropolitans, or archbishops,

would support, if not supplant, the provincial governors; and the synod of bishops would succeed the provincial assembly. The Roman Church followed in the footsteps of the Roman state; it conquered the provinces, beautified the capital, and established discipline and unity from frontier to frontier. Rome died in giving birth to the Church; the Church matured by inheriting and accepting the responsibilities of Rome” (*The Story of Civilization*, Vol. 5, Durant, pp. 575, 618–619).

As new and false elements were added to this “Christianity,” the authentic elements were crowded out. Sometimes this occurred because of anti-Semitic feelings. Since Jesus Christ was physically from the tribe of Judah, many Gnostics denied His bodily appearance—they refused to accept that their God had been from this much-despised tribe. Others perverted Christ’s teachings because they hated the nation from which those teachings came. They knew that Christians kept the “Jewish” Holy Days and adhered to other practices that pagan observers found offensive. Early church historian Eusebius wrote of those who, holding this sentiment, sought to replace the New Testament Passover that Christ kept with the Easter festival drawn from Ishtar-worship:

“It appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews [of keeping Passover on the 14th of Nisan], who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul.... Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd; for we have received from our Savior a different way.... Beloved brethren, let us with one consent adopt this course, and withdraw ourselves from all participation in their baseness.... For how should they be capable of forming a sound judgment, who, since their... guilt in slaying their Lord, have been subject to the direction, not of reason, but of... every impulse of the mad spirit that is in them?... Strive and pray continually that the purity of your soul may not seem in anything to be sullied by fellowship with the custom of these most wicked men.... All should unite in desiring that which sound reason appears to demand, avoiding all participation in the perjured conduct of the Jews” (Eusebius, *The Life of Constantine*, bk. 3, chaps. 18–19, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1979, vol. 1, pp. 524–525).

A FAR "DIFFERENT" WAY

Yes, many taught that "we have received from our Savior a different way." But that way is not found in the Bible. Instead, it is found in the customs of the Greeks and Romans and other European converts who adopted Christianity on the surface but kept their old ways. With the passage of time, these old ways overwhelmed the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Apostles, as discussed by John Romer below:

"Subtly, so subtly that the bishops themselves had not seen them, the old gods had entered their churches like the air of the Mediterranean. And they live still in Christian ritual, in the iconography and the festivals of Christianity. When Julian arrived in Antioch in 362... the great Christian city was in mourning, bewailing in the Levantine manner the annual death of Adonis, Venus's beautiful lover. At Ephesus, though the sanctuary of Diana, goddess of the city, was taken down... her statues were carefully buried in dry sand. And when the Third Council of the church assembly at Ephesus solemnly voted that henceforth the Virgin Mary should be honoured with the title of Theotokos, the God-bearer, Ephesus, itself for centuries the city of the virgin hunter Diana, became the city of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. In Egypt, too, the ancient sign of life, the ankh, which the gods had carried in their sculptures for thousands of years, was easily transformed into the Christian cross; the figure of Isis nursing her child Horus, Isis Lactans, became the figure of the Virgin with Jesus at her breast.... At Rome, Romulus and Remus were swapped for the biblical saints Peter and Paul. And still in the fifth century, the Pope had to stop the early morning congregation of St Peter's from walking up the church steps backwards so as not to offend Sol, the rising sun god. Similarly, 25 December, now Christ's birthday, was also the day of Sol Invictus' festival and Constantine's birthday. This festival was celebrated by cutting green branches and hanging little lights on them, and presents were given out in the god's name. Sol's weekly festival Sol-day—Sunday—became the Christian Sabbath. Just as Apollo of Delphi had made a beautiful transformation to become the Roman Sol Invictus, so later he became a Christ of the sun. All three of them are sometimes pictured in their

fiery chariots... with... radiant haloes” (*Testament: The Bible and History*, Romer, 1988, pp. 230–31).

So we can see that true Christianity has been opposed from the very beginning by those who would turn it away from the true God whose commandments Jesus Christ upheld. But many of today’s professing Christians do not realize just where those commandments came from, and who proclaimed them on Mount Sinai.

THE GOD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

In Matthew 22:42–45, Jesus challenged the religious leaders: “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” They said to Him, ‘The Son of David.’ He said to them, ‘How then does David in the Spirit call Him “Lord,” saying: “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool”?’ If David then calls Him “Lord,” how is He his Son?” The Pharisees were not able to answer. For they knew that King David of Israel certainly had no *human* “lord.” This scripture had to be describing *two personalities* in God’s Family—one greater than the other. And, as should be obvious to us, David’s *immediate* “Lord”—the one who later became Jesus of Nazareth—was told to sit at the right hand of the Father *until* it was time for Him to become King of kings.

Yet the Jews had known that the coming Messiah was to be a literal “son of David.” How could this one also be David’s “Lord,” but have a still “greater” Lord telling Him what to do?

In 1 Corinthians 10:1–4, we read that ancient Israel was baptized into Moses and they all “ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual *rock* that followed them, and that *rock* was Christ.” Again, it is clear—as a number of Bible commentaries acknowledge—that the spirit Personality who dealt with ancient Israel was the One who became Christ. For, as we have seen, Jesus said that “no one” had ever seen “God”—obviously meaning the One we call the Father.

Yet, right after giving the Ten Commandments and some of the statutes to ancient Israel, we find that the “God of Israel” did indeed appear to some of Israel’s leaders! “Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. But on

the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank” (Exodus 24:9–11). So more than 70 of the leaders of Israel “*saw* the God of Israel”—*not* God the Father, but the “Word” who later became Jesus Christ (John 1:1–12). Could anything be more clear?

It was the One who became Jesus Christ who literally walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. *He* was the One who dealt directly with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. *He* was the One who spoke “face to face” with Moses (Numbers 12:8). *He* was the One who spoke the Ten Commandments from the top of Mount Sinai! *He* was the One who commanded the seventh-day Sabbath.

If all professing Christians were taught the *truth* that the One who became their Savior is the One who gave the Ten Commandments, perhaps their actions would be quite different. The world would be a *much* safer place! All would realize that true Christianity is a *law abiding* religion—a *way* of life based on the great spiritual law of God. They would learn that—although *no one* is suddenly perfect, and we are commanded to *grow* in Christ’s character—it is possible to follow Christ’s inspired example through His Spirit within us.

HOW CAN A CHRISTIAN LIVE AS CHRIST DID?

The Bible makes it plain that Christians are to keep God’s commandments. The Apostle John wrote: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:3–6).

But how can Christians walk “just as He walked”? If Jesus Christ had to come and give His life because all have violated God’s law, how can anyone keep that law? Again, perhaps the most concise explanation was given by the Apostle Paul. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, *but Christ liveth in me*: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, KJV).

A Christian does not obey the law on his own, but through the power of Christ living in Him. Paul goes on to emphasize that law-keeping comes through the grace of God, and that law-keeping does

not earn grace. “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Galatians 2:21). With God’s grace, a converted Christian *will* keep the law; but without that grace, *no amount* of effort will bring righteousness and salvation.

WHAT SHOULD A CHRISTIAN DO?

One can recognize a true Christian as someone striving, through Christ’s help, to live by every word of God (cf. Matthew 4:4). “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). By yielding to Jesus Christ, the fruits of the Spirit will become more and more evident in a Christian’s life.

A Christian is more than someone who “knows” the truth. The Gnostics believed that “knowledge” brought salvation, and some today would deny that one has to “do” anything as a faithful Christian. Yet Scripture gives a very different instruction: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22).

Christians are to *do* as Christ did. In the “Great Commission” He instructed His followers: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations... teaching them to observe *all things* that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19–20). Christians are to take His message to “all the nations” and teach “all things” that He commanded! They were *not* to *change* His message so much that it is today almost unrecognizable!

Sadly, many who call themselves Christians today—even *commandment-keeping Christians*—have turned inward. Saying that they must “prepare the bride” (the Church) for Christ’s return, they neglect the Bridegroom’s instructions. How can the Church “prepare” for His coming by neglecting His instruction to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom to *all* nations? (Matthew 24:14). It cannot! That is why the Living Church of God has sent you this booklet, and why we print booklets, magazines, a Bible study course and other publications. It is why we broadcast the *Tomorrow’s World* telecast. It is why we use the Internet and other tools that God provides to do His work as He opens doors for His Message to be given to the world as a witness before He returns!

It is important that all our readers fully recognize that those of us in this Work—those of us on the staff of the *Tomorrow’s World* magazine, of the *Tomorrow’s World* television program and, indeed, all of us involved in this Work of the Living Church of God—are all

dedicated to the task of *restoring the original Christianity taught and practiced by Jesus Christ and His Apostles!*

As you read our articles and booklets, and as you view the *Tomorrow's World* program, it is vital that you recognize “where we are coming from.” For we intend to continue to preach and teach the *same message* that Jesus and the early Apostles did. We intend to restore—in all of its spiritual aspects—the way of life that Jesus and the Apostles lived and taught. Also, guided by God’s Spirit, we will continue to preach the inspired prophecies of the Bible and warn those willing to listen of what lies ahead.

As the time of God’s intervention in human affairs and the soon-coming *Great Tribulation* approaches, it is absolutely vital that you and your loved ones make sure that you truly belong to Jesus Christ—the Christ of the Bible—that you are worshiping God “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23), and that you are part of the true Church of God which teaches and practices the Christianity of Jesus and the original Apostles. “He who has an ear, let him hear” (Revelation 3:13).

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