



# **FAITH IS A CHOICE**

## **Working Out Your Own Salvation**

Work out your own salvation  
with fear and trembling;  
for it is God who is at work in you,  
enabling you both to will and to work  
for his good pleasure.

Do all things without murmuring and arguing,  
so that you may be blameless and innocent,  
children of God without blemish  
in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation,  
in which you shine like stars in the world.

**Philippians 2:12-15**

**Dr. James T. Reuteler, Ph.D.**

Aurora, Colorado

2011





## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Introduction .....	5
1. Theological Foundations .....	9
2. Sacred Scripture .....	17
3. Who is Jesus? .....	25
4. Ethical Assumptions .....	35
5. Beyond the Law .....	43
6. Scriptural Salvation .....	57
7. The Way of Salvation .....	65
8. Formulating the Mission .....	75
9. Supporting the Mission .....	85
10. Organizing for Mission .....	97
11. The Body of Christ .....	109
12. The New Jerusalem .....	119
Afterword .....	133
Other Books by the Author .....	135





## **INTRODUCTION**

I have always been intrigued by Paul's advice to the Philippians: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you." If God is at work in us, why do we need to work out our own salvation? Hasn't that been taken care of on the cross, where the grace of God is revealed to us through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus?

After Paul, no one talked more about the grace of God than John Wesley; and yet, Wesley gave the same advice: "Work out your own salvation!" We need to work out our own salvation because grace comes to us in three movements. First, there is the grace that seeks us; secondly, there is the grace that justifies us; and finally, there is the grace that sanctifies us. We must ask ourselves, "With which movement of grace are we currently dealing?" Are we dealing with

seeking grace,<sup>1</sup> justifying grace, or sanctifying grace? This is what we have to work out. We have to make some choices.

I'm starting from the beginning. Why do I believe in God? What is Scripture? Who is Jesus? What is the Christian Ethic? What is salvation? What is the mission of the Church? What is the Church? What is the New Jerusalem? How do we fit into all this?

My resources for answering all these questions is reason, my heart, the Old Testament, which I will call the Hebrew Covenant, and the New Testament, which I will call the Christian Covenant.

I also have difficulty with using the term "Church." I prefer to refer to the Church in one of three ways and possibly a fourth. To me the Church is better referred to as the *People of God*, the *Body of Christ*, or the *Fellowship of the Holy Spirit*. A possible fourth way of referring to the Church would be the community of believers.<sup>2</sup>

I like the *Body of Christ* best. In 1 Corinthians 12:27, Paul reminds a congregation having serious difficulties: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." With all of its divisions, the Corinthian congregation hardly acted like the *Body of Christ*, but calling it the *Body of Christ* was significant. The mistake we make today is to welcome people into the church as if they were joining a club. Welcoming people into the church is not as powerful as welcoming people into the *Body of Christ*. More is expected of those who belong to the *Body Christ*. Christ has a mission and as part of his body, so do we.

---

<sup>1</sup> Prevenient grace is the more common term, but I find that difficult to understand. That is why I've changed it to seeking grace.

<sup>2</sup> An alternative to the *community of believers* would be the *Communion of saints*.

Another term I don't like is "church member." Jesus never called anyone to join a church or a synagogue. He only called us to become disciples, and as disciples, we are to take up our cross and follow him. Church member just doesn't cut it. Disciple should not scare us. It simply means "pupil" or "student." In becoming disciples we begin a lifelong journey of learning what it means to follow Jesus.

The symbol I've used above is the combination of the star of David and the Jerusalem cross. The star of David is a symbol of an earlier Messiah (anointed King). The cross is the symbol of a later Messiah, fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth. Around the cross are the acts of compassion, justice, worship and devotion, the four acts of balanced discipleship.<sup>3</sup> These are the choices we must make if we are going to respond to Jesus' invitation to become his disciples. These are also the tools for working out our own salvation. It is up to us to choose faith.

What follows is a statement of how I have worked out my own salvation. I do not expect everyone to agree with my conclusions. I do, however, expect the reader to work out his or her own salvation.

---

<sup>3</sup> David Lowes Watson, *Covenant Discipleship* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1998), p. 78.







## **1. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

### **The World is Created by God**

I believe in God and I believe that God created the world. I don't care if it took God a few seconds or billions of years to create the world. The Genesis creation story does not say



how God created the world, only that He did. Genesis 1:1 assumes his creative act when it says, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth...”<sup>4</sup> This is where my theology begins, with the assumption that God created the heavens and the earth, and that both the heavens and the earth are good. “God saw everything that he made, and indeed, it was very good.”<sup>5</sup> If there is any evil or sin in the world, it was not created by God.

Why or how can I make such an assumption? “Either God exists or he does not exist,” writes Blaise Pascal, “What is your bet?” “The stake to be put up is slight, or even ‘nothing’ when compared with the prize to be won...” When Pascal says that the gambler for God will lose nothing, even if he turns out to be mistaken, what he means is that the stake seems like nothing in comparison with the prize. Pascal clears the way for the “reasons of the heart.”<sup>6</sup> I’m ready to make the bet: God exists, he created heaven and earth, and everything he created is good. These statements shape my theological starting point. This is my choice.

### **With Natural and Divine Laws**

The next question to be answered has to do with the kind of heaven and earth God created. My answer would be that he created heaven and earth that follow both the natural laws of the universe and the divine laws given to us through Moses. The natural laws can be observed and physicists are better equipped to name them than I am, but I do believe in their existence. The most obvious one would be the law of

---

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1:1 (NRSV)

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1:31 (NRSV)

<sup>6</sup> Roger Hazelton, *Blaise Pascal: The Genius of his Thought* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), p. 192.



gravity. Just as there are natural laws in the universe, there are also divine laws that control the quality of life on earth. We find them in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. In the Hebrew Scriptures they begin with a commandment from and about God. “Then God spoke all these words: ‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.’”<sup>7</sup> In the Christian Scriptures Jesus was asked to quote the most important commandment of all, and Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”<sup>8</sup>

I believe that life on earth can only be in harmony when both the natural laws of the universe and the divine laws of God are obeyed. The world is like a precision clock and God created it to operate according to these two sets of laws.

---

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 20:1-2ff. (NRSV)

<sup>8</sup> Mark 12:29-31 (NRSV)

Human beings, however, have been given the freedom to obey or disobey these laws. To disobey any of them is to introduce into the world what we might call evil or sin. It's like jamming a monkey wrench into the gears of a precision clock. When we do this, we cannot blame God, for he created the heavens and the earth to run according to these laws. We can only blame ourselves, for we have been warned as to what will happen when we are able to distinguish between good and evil. Evil has an attraction to us, and when we give in to it, one might say we will experience punishment from God, but maybe it's a kind of self-inflicted punishment.

### **People are Created with Free Will**

The origin of evil or sin was and is introduced into our world by human free will, which is illustrated in the Adam and Eve story. “The Lord took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God



commanded the man, ‘You may freely eat of every tree (including the tree of life) in the garden; but of the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”<sup>9</sup>

Without free will, holding people accountable for their behavior and actions makes no sense. If there is no free will, then the only alternative is predestination. It would also mean that God is the creator of both good and evil. Of course we could take a middle-of-the-road position and affirm either a limited free will or a limited predestination. Such a position would make accountability even more difficult. We would open the door to saying, “God created me this way and I can’t help myself,” or “The devil made me do it.” Limited free will makes it too easy to avoid responsibility for our behavior and actions.

We may not be able to control our feelings, but God has given us free will to control our behavior and actions. If we can’t do this by ourselves, then we need to be part of a small group that will nurture us, support us and hold us accountable. Dr. Seuss suggests a method for controlling one’s free will. He says:

You have brains in your head.  
You have feet in your shoes.  
You can steer yourself  
Any direction you choose.<sup>10</sup>

### **People Conform or Rebel**

Along with free will comes the responsibility to make choices, both in regard to what one will believe and how that belief works itself out in moral behavior and moral actions. Romans 12:1-2 describes the process perfectly:

---

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 2:15-17 (NRSV)

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Hillary Clinton in, *It Takes a Village*, (Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 146.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.<sup>11</sup>



Along with freedom comes responsibility for faith and morality, the goal of which is holiness. God himself calls us into holiness. “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”<sup>12</sup> Holiness is a choice. The four choices that lead to holiness are:

- H**umble yourself before God!
- O**bey the natural and divine Laws!
- L**ove God, yourself and others!
- Y**ield to the Holy Spirit!

The free choice of faith and morality cannot be put off. Time is running out. The urgency of choosing is emphasized

---

<sup>11</sup> Romans 12:1-2 (NRSV)

<sup>12</sup> Leviticus 19:2 (NRSV)

in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. As Joshua led God's people into the promised land, he commanded, "...choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."<sup>13</sup>

Jesus and Paul both warned that God's Kingdom would come like a thief in the night.<sup>14</sup> Before he ascended into Heaven, his disciples asked, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus replied,

It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.<sup>15</sup>

Time is running out. Now is the time to conform. God promises the Holy Spirit to help us exercise the free will he has bestowed upon us. Even if God's Kingdom is not established for a thousand years, our lives could end at any moment; hence, exercising free will is urgent. It is up to us to choose our faith and work out our own salvation.

---

<sup>13</sup> Joshua 24:15 (NRSV)

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thessalonians 5:2 (NRSV)

<sup>15</sup> Acts 1:6-8 (NRSV)







## 2. SACRED SCRIPTURE

### The Hebrew Covenant

All major religions have Scripture. How does one decide which set of Scriptures are worth choosing? While I have not read all the Scriptures from all of the world's religions, I have studied all the major religions, and I have chosen Christianity. I'll give my reasons later when I narrow my focus on Jesus. Within Christianity, there is also the question of what to do with what is commonly known as the Old Testament. Some reject the God of the Old Testament, and others try to make the Old Testament Scriptures more palatable by calling them the Hebrew Scriptures. I prefer to call them the Hebrew Covenant. The word *Testament* is better understood as *Covenant*. I am not willing to reject the God of the Hebrew Covenant. I recognize why some do, but I see the roots or foundation of the Christian Covenant in the Hebrew Covenant. The two cannot be separated. The God of the Hebrew Covenant is also the God of the Christian Covenant.

Both Covenants are the same. The Bible as a whole is a sacred history of our understanding of the God who created us and enters into a covenant with us. There is misunderstanding in both the Hebrew Covenant and the Christian Covenant.

I'd like to deal with one of the most common misconceptions. It usually runs as follows. The God of the Hebrew Covenant is a God of Hell, fire and brimstone and the God of the Christian Covenant is a God of love and compassion. Why do I call this a misconception? The concept of Hell cannot even be found in the Hebrew Covenant. The closest would be Sheol, but Sheol is not the same as Hell. Sheol is merely the place of the dead and has nothing to do with punishment. The prophets of the Hebrew Covenant deal with punishment on earth because they don't believe in an afterlife. Justice must be established in this world. The Pharisees did develop a belief in the Resurrection of the Body, but they weren't thinking of a spirit world in Heaven. It's Jesus in the Christian Covenant that presents the option of Heaven or Hell. The most vivid example of this can be found in the scene of the Last Judgment in which the sheep will be separated from the goats. The sheep will be accepted into God's Kingdom and the goats will find themselves not in Sheol, but in Hell. The development of Satan and a place of punishment cannot be found in the Hebrew Covenant. Satan is an angel who may tempt people, but he also carries on a dialogue with God in the Book of Job. It is in the New Covenant where he finally ends up in the Lake of Fire, which is also a place of eternal torment.

Just what is the Hebrew Covenant? Martin Luther once described the Hebrew Covenant as the manger in which the Christ was laid, and he found plenty of straw in that manger. I'm not going to defend the difficult passages in the Hebrew Covenant. There is a lot of straw to be found there, but there is also a Covenant that Jesus fulfilled. In Matthew 5:17, he

says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”<sup>16</sup> Just what is it that Jesus refuses to abolish? The heart of the Hebrew Covenant can be found in the Ten Commandments, four of which have to do with our relationship with God and six of which govern human relationships. This is the heart of the Law and the Prophets. The prophet who said it best was Jeremiah:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.<sup>17</sup>

The problem with the Hebrew Covenant was that it was written in stone when it needed to be written in the heart. The Ten Commandments are still relevant. They just need to be inscribed in the heart. This was the original intent of the Hebrew Covenant, but there was resistance. The call to holiness had this intent. God told Moses to say to the whole congregation, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God

---

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 5:17 (NRSV)

<sup>17</sup> Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NRSV)

am holy.”<sup>18</sup> Holiness involves loving God and loving one’s neighbor. The call to love God is clearly given in Deuteronomy 6:5, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”<sup>19</sup> The call to love the neighbor is clearly given in Leviticus 19:18, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.”<sup>20</sup> There is nothing wrong with the Hebrew Covenant. The various elements just have to be put together and inscribed in the heart, and that’s precisely what Jesus came to do. So, now let’s examine the Christian Covenant.

### **The Christian Covenant**

In the New Testament, which I prefer to call the Christian Covenant, we have four portraits of Jesus in the four Gospels, an account of the development of the early Church, a number of letters dealing with problems in the churches, and finally, an Apocalyptic Message<sup>21</sup> to comfort Christians who were facing martyrdom.

It’s easy to get lost in all this material. We can also find many differences in the various accounts of Jesus’ ministry, including his healings and his miracles, and Paul’s attempt to proclaim Jesus as the Jewish Messiah (Anointed King). Just what is the heart of the Christian Covenant? It certainly isn’t the healings and miracles. When the crowds came to Jesus to be healed, Jesus said, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also for I was sent for this purpose.”<sup>22</sup> Just what is this good news Jesus came to proclaim? In the Gospel of Mark, the earliest of the Gospels,

---

<sup>18</sup> Leviticus 19:2 (NRSV)

<sup>19</sup> Deuteronomy 6:5 (NRSV)

<sup>20</sup> Leviticus 19:18 (NRSV)

<sup>21</sup> The Book of Revelation

<sup>22</sup> Luke 4:43 (NRSV)

we are told what the good news is. John the Baptist stood in between the Hebrew and Christian Covenants, and came on the scene like one of the Old prophets, and he was quickly arrested. Mark wastes no time in telling what the good news is. “Now when John was arrested,” he wrote, “Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent, and believe in the good news.’”<sup>23</sup>

Jesus has not yet revealed the covenant to his disciples. He has only told them the good news of the coming of God’s kingdom. The Christian Covenant, which both Jeremiah and Ezekiel saw coming, will now be revealed by Jesus to his disciples. The subject is raised not by the disciples, but by a scribe who asks, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answers, “The first is, ‘Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no greater commandment than these.” The scribe agreed with Jesus and was told by him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”<sup>24</sup> Jesus’ task now is to get these two commandments into the hearts of his disciples.

How does Jesus mediate this new covenant? He did this in his last supper with his disciples. After sharing bread with his disciples, he did the same with the cup, saying “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”<sup>25</sup> Paul understood what was happening. In his letter to the Corinthian Church, he wrote, concerning his authority to preach about this new covenant, “...our competence is from

---

<sup>23</sup> Mark 1:14-15 (NRSV)

<sup>24</sup> Mark 12:28-34 (NRSV)

<sup>25</sup> Luke 22:20 (NRSV)

God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life.”<sup>26</sup> Just as Jeremiah and Ezekiel talked about eating a scroll to ingest the Word of God,<sup>27</sup> Jesus commands us to share the bread and the cup as a way of having the double commandment written in our hearts. This is how the Law is fulfilled, and this double commandment is related to the Ten Commandments of the Hebrew Covenant; only, they are not merely written in stone. They are inscribed in the heart.

While the bread and cup are symbols reminding us of Jesus’ death on the cross, they are also symbols of the Christian covenant when love for God and love for neighbor are inscribed in our hearts. The important question has little to do with whether the bread and cup are really the body and blood of Christ. The important question is, “Has the double commandment of the Christian covenant been inscribed in our hearts?” When this has happened, we don’t need the Law, for we will be guided by the spirit of the Anointed King (Messiah or Christ). That’s why both the traditional and modern invitations to the Lord’s Supper make loving God and one’s neighbor a requirement for participating in the Lord’s Supper:

Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways: Draw near with faith, and take this

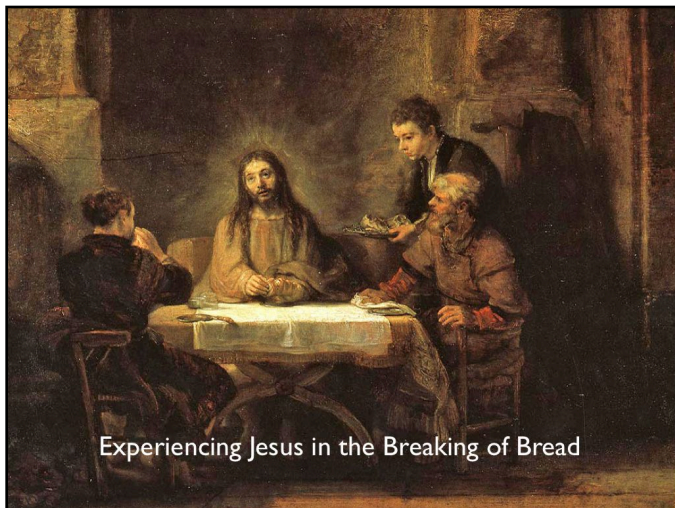
---

<sup>26</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:5-6 (NRSV)

<sup>27</sup> See Ezekiel 3:1-3; Jeremiah 15:16, Zechariah 5:1-4 and Revelation 10:8-10 (NRSV)

holy Sacrament to your comfort, and make your humble confession to almighty God.<sup>28</sup>

Christ our Lord invites to the table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another. Therefore, let us confess our sin before God and one another



Experiencing Jesus in the Breaking of Bread

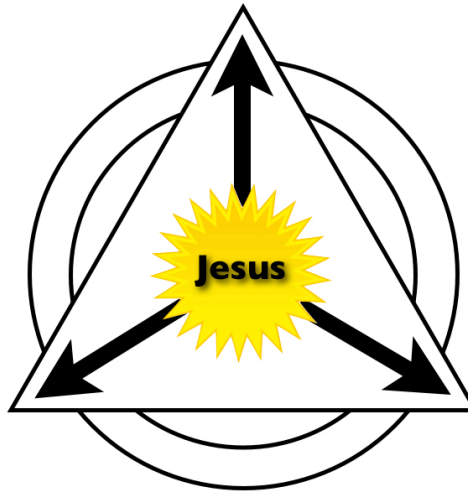
Painting by Rembrandt (1606-1669)

---

<sup>28</sup> *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), p. 26.







### **3. WHO IS JESUS?**

#### **The Messiah [Anointed King]**

Thus far, all I have said about Jesus is that he claimed to be the Messiah, who would suffer, die, and be raised from the dead. Who is He? Is he just another human being, or is He God? These are difficult questions to answer. Two Christian affirmations make them difficult. The first is the affirmation of the Virgin Birth and the second is the claim that he rose from the dead. Neither of these claims were required to call him the Jewish Messiah, who only had to be related to King David and be anointed and ascend to the throne. No one expected the Messiah to be born of a Virgin or be raised from the dead. While both Matthew and Luke<sup>29</sup> refer to Mary being a Virgin, they quote Isaiah 7:14 from the Septuagint<sup>30</sup>, which says, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.

---

<sup>29</sup> See Matthew 1:23 and Luke 1:27 and 34.

<sup>30</sup> The Greek Version of the Jewish Scriptures.

Look, the *young woman* is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.” Now a young woman can be a Virgin, but it does not follow that every young woman is a Virgin. The alternative to Mary’s Virginity, however, is that she and Joseph engaged in premarital sex, which would have been a sin and Mary would have given birth to an illegitimate son. We cannot prove nor can we disprove the Virgin Birth. What we need to understand is that Matthew and Luke are making theological statements about Jesus. He is God’s Son, not Joseph’s son; and yet, he is also human, for he was born of Mary.

From the witnesses of the four Gospels, we know that Jesus did claim to be the Messiah. In Mark 8:27, Jesus takes his disciples to Caesarea Philippi and asks them, “Who do people say that I am?” They answer, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” And Jesus asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” And Jesus sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.”<sup>31</sup> Jesus then teaches them that as the Messiah he will have to “undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.”<sup>32</sup> Jesus was pointing to something no one anticipated. They thought that he would be the Jewish Messiah everyone expected, but he saw himself as an anointed King of another world—the Kingdom of God. Does his Resurrection mean that He was or is God? Jesus also taught that all of his followers would experience a Resurrection, but that does not make us all gods. In John 11:25, Jesus said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.” Jesus was making a theological statement that everyone who lives and believes in him will

---

<sup>31</sup> Mark 8:28-30 (NRSV)

<sup>32</sup> Mark 8:31 (NRSV)

never die.<sup>33</sup> He was not claiming to be God, but he was claiming to hold a special status in the coming Kingdom of God. He was claiming to be the Anointed King of that Kingdom.

### **One with the Father [God]**

In John 10:30, Jesus says, “The Father and I are one.” What does He mean? Is this a claim to be God? It could be interpreted as a claim to divinity, or it could be a claim to be in a special relationship with God. In John 17:21, Jesus also prays that we all might enter into a special relationship with God: “As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

The point being made is that we have all been created in the Image of God<sup>34</sup>, but in Jesus we find that perfect image being revealed. When Philip asked Jesus to show him the way to God, Jesus replied, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”<sup>35</sup> Jesus went on to say, “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.”<sup>36</sup> Since we are all created in the divine image, we should all have that special relationship with God, but we must admit that Jesus’ relationship seems more perfect than our own. The Apostle Paul certainly believed that Jesus was the Christ [Messiah], the perfect revelation of God. In his letter to the Colossians he wrote: “He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of creation....”<sup>37</sup> Paul may have meant more than calling

---

<sup>33</sup> John 11:25-26 (NRSV)

<sup>34</sup> Genesis 1:26

<sup>35</sup> John 14:9 (NRSV)

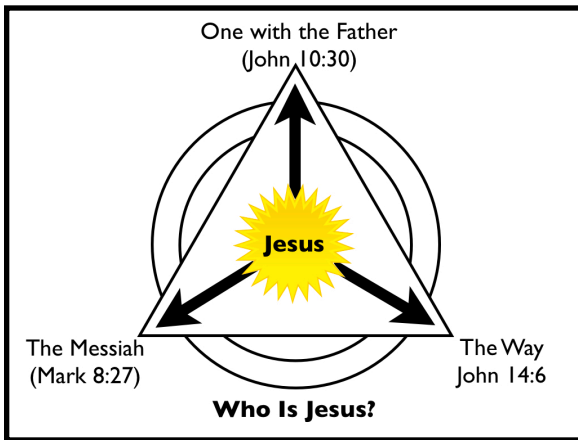
<sup>36</sup> John 14:11 (NRSV)

<sup>37</sup> Colossians 1:15 (NRSV)

Jesus the perfect revelation of God, but he did mean that in Jesus Christ we have a window into the invisible God, who created us all in his own image. In Jesus we know what that image is, and he becomes a window and a mirror for us all. Through this window we gain a glimpse of God and when we look into this mirror we realize how far short we are from being one with the Father.

### **The Way [The Truth and the Life]**

One of Jesus’ most controversial statements is found in



John 14:6, where He said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” If Jesus is that perfect image of the Father, this statement makes sense. In my opinion, C.S. Lewis has given the best interpretation of this passage:

Is it not frightfully unfair that this new life should be confined to people who have heard of Christ and been able to believe in Him? But the truth is God has not told us what his arrangements about the other people are. We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him. But if you are

worried about the people outside, the most unreasonable thing you can do is to remain outside yourself.<sup>38</sup>

What we should be concerned with is “the way.” It took the early church more than three hundred years to define the three persons of the Trinity. The first persons to follow Jesus were simply called followers of *the Way*. The first one to use this term was Paul as he hunted down Christians. He asked “for letters to the synagogues at Damascus so that if he found any who belonged to *the way*, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”<sup>39</sup> After Paul became a follower of *the Way*, Barnabas sought him out and took him to Antioch to teach *the Way*, and “...it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.”<sup>40</sup> Christians were defined as persons who followed *the way* of Jesus.

Just what is *the Way*? I believe *the Way* is clearly outlined in Jesus’ double commandment to love God and the neighbor, including the enemy, and in the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>41</sup> Everything else is commentary and illustrative material we call Scripture. Jesus revealed God to us and taught us enough of *the Way* to enable us to follow it, but is Jesus God? The early church took three hundred years to claim that he was one hundred percent human and one hundred percent divine. They were making a theological statement to affirm their belief in his perfect revelation of the invisible God. At the same time they were claiming that he was fully human. He was the perfect image of God, and we too have been created in the image of God. We are called to become followers of *the Way*.

---

<sup>38</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Touchstone Books, 1980), p. 65.

<sup>39</sup> Acts 9:2, but also Acts 18:25 and Acts 19:9 (NRSV)

<sup>40</sup> Acts 11:26

<sup>41</sup> Mark 12:28-31 and Matthew 5-7

That’s precisely what John and Charles Wesley were attempting to do when they started the Holy Club. The Wesley brothers defined holiness as their goal and when asked what it meant, they simply referred to Jesus’ double commandment to love God and the neighbor. They were intent on following *the Way*. Those who scoffed at them, ridiculed them by calling them Bible Moths, Enthusiasts, and Methodists. Since “Methodists” was most descriptive of what they were doing, it stuck and even though they didn’t like the term, they accepted it.

When asked what they were about, John Wesley said,

Our societies were formed from those who were wandering upon the dark mountains, that belonged to no Christian Church; but were awakened by the preaching of the Methodists, who had pursued them through the wilderness of this world to the High-ways and the Hedges—to the Markets and the Fairs—to the Hills and the Dales—who set up the Standard of the Cross in the Streets and Lanes of the Cities, in the Villages, in the Barns, and Farmers’ Kitchens, etc.—and all this done in such a way, and to such an extent, as never had been done before since the Apostolic Age.<sup>42</sup>

Methodist Societies were set up with small required groups called Class Meetings and smaller optional groups called Band Meetings. The latter were gender specific. Both groups were designed to imitate to some extent what was going on in the early church as is described in Acts 2:42: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and with prayers.”

To be a follower of *the Way* means that we will search for right beliefs and right actions, but we do it together. We look

---

<sup>42</sup>Quoted by William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 53.

for a *way* or *method* that will support one another and hold one another accountable.

### The Trinity?

Finally, I feel like I must say something about the Trinity. It is, after all, a teaching of most Christian Churches. It is usually the first statement of belief, and it's difficult to ignore.

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.<sup>43</sup>

The part that troubles many is the word *substance*. Are we dealing with an *ontological*<sup>44</sup> Trinity, or is the Trinity our way of *experiencing* God? The word substance is used to affirm the oneness of God and to prevent us from thinking of three Gods. It's a theological statement affirming one God, even though we may experience God in three ways. First, we think of God as our Creator. It's pretty difficult to deny some form of creation, even if we understand it in terms of evolution. It is the Father who initiates creation and so we affirm God as Father, the creator of heaven and earth.

The second person of the Trinity is more difficult. The use of the term person is confusing to us and it doesn't help to say "three persons of one substance." We naturally think of persons as individuals and Jesus was an individual born of Mary by means of the Holy Spirit. That makes him appear to be half human and half divine. Some Christians teach the two natures of Jesus. According to them, Jesus is 50% human and

---

<sup>43</sup> The first Article of Religion in the Anglican, Episcopal, and Methodist Churches.

<sup>44</sup> The nature of being.

50% divine. The Church would not accept such a solution and insisted that Jesus is 100% human and 100% divine. This is a theological statement insisting that God has indeed revealed himself to us in Jesus. What Jesus taught can be trusted, for the revelation that came through Him came from God Himself. When we reject Jesus' teaching we reject God, and when Jesus was crucified it was God who was being crucified. Jesus' invitation to repent and get ready for the coming Kingdom of God is God's own invitation; hence, in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection we discover the way of salvation and become citizens of God's own Kingdom.

When we talk about the Holy Spirit, we are not troubled by the term "person," but the Holy Spirit is as much related to the Trinitarian concept of God as is Jesus, God's only begotten Son. Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to all believers. Just what is the Holy Spirit and what does the Holy Spirit do? The Holy Spirit guides and empowers us to be witnesses in the world.<sup>45</sup> Our difficulty is distinguishing between our own human spirit and God's Holy Spirit. Paul helps us out by describing the fruit of the Holy Spirit: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."<sup>46</sup>

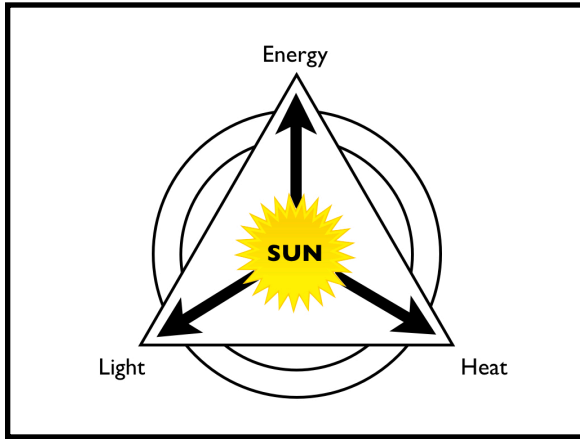
Many scholars have tried to illustrate the Trinity in concrete ways, and I'm not sure I can do better. I would illustrate the Trinity with the sun, but in no way do I consider the sun to be God. The sun and all of nature have been created by God, but let's for a moment view the sun as God. Our life on earth depends upon the sun, so, let's call the energy of the sun "God the Father." We can see the sun only because it sends rays of light to us. Let's call these rays of light "Jesus the Son." After all, Jesus said, "I am the light of

---

<sup>45</sup> See Acts 1:8

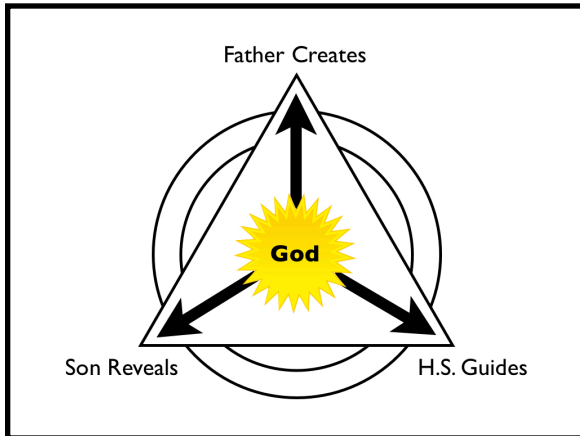
<sup>46</sup> Galatians 5:22-23 (NRSV)





the world.”<sup>47</sup> Finally, we feel the warmth of the sun, which I would compare to the presence of the Holy Spirit who guides with the nine fruit of the spirit,

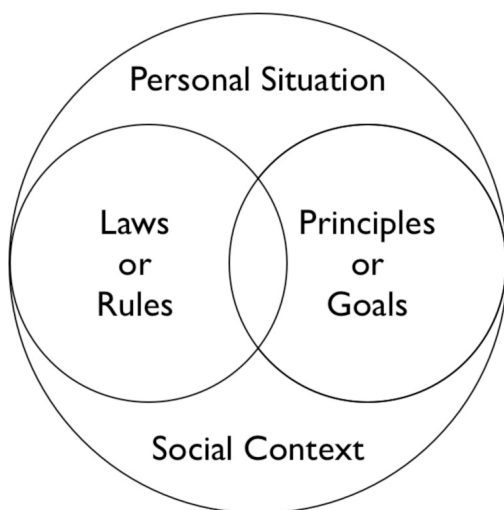
Are there three suns? No! We experience the same sun in three ways. Are there three Gods? No! We experience the one God as Father and Creator. We experience a revelation from that God in Jesus, the light of the world, and we experience the presence of God in the warmth of the Holy Spirit. Is this a




---

<sup>47</sup> John 8:12 (NRSV)

mystery? It is indeed. It is beyond our human comprehension to understand, and that's why we need to describe the Trinity in terms that we can comprehend.



## **4. ETHICAL ASSUMPTIONS**

### **Theology and Ethics**

One cannot develop an ethic apart from one's theology, or lack of it. Juan Luis Segundo describes this relationship best:

Our falsified and inauthentic ways of dealing with our fellow men are allied to our falsifications of the idea of God. Our unjust society and our perverted idea of God are in close and terrible alliance.<sup>48</sup>

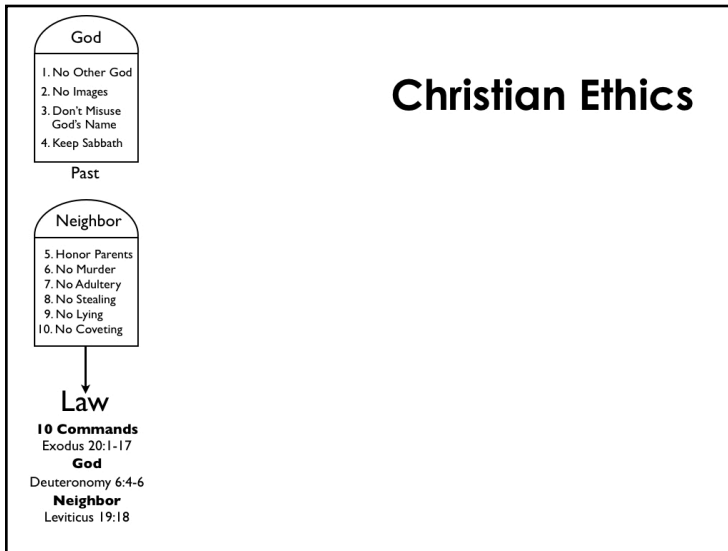
Obviously an atheist can develop some kind of ethic to guide moral behavior that is humane, and religious persons can behave in inhumane ways. A great many religious persons create gods in their own image, and if that image is false, whatever ethic they develop will contain the seeds of sin and

---

<sup>48</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, *Our Idea of God* (New York: Orbis Books), pp. 7-8.

injustice. I started with theology because I'm assuming that our theology gives birth to our moral behavior.

## 1. The Ten Commandments



Assuming that God really did speak to Moses on Mount Sinai and that God really revealed himself in Jesus, the Ten Commandments have to be our starting point for developing an ethic, at least for Jews and Christians. There are four commandments dealing with our relationship with God (theology) and six social commandments dealing with our relationship with one another (social ethics). The social commandments come out of the theological commandments.<sup>49</sup> This means that Christians, as well as Jews, have Laws to obey, and these are Divine Laws because they were given to us by God. For Jews they came through Moses and for Christians they came through Moses and were interpreted by Jesus. There is obviously an element of faith in this, for we believe that God gave these Laws for us to obey.

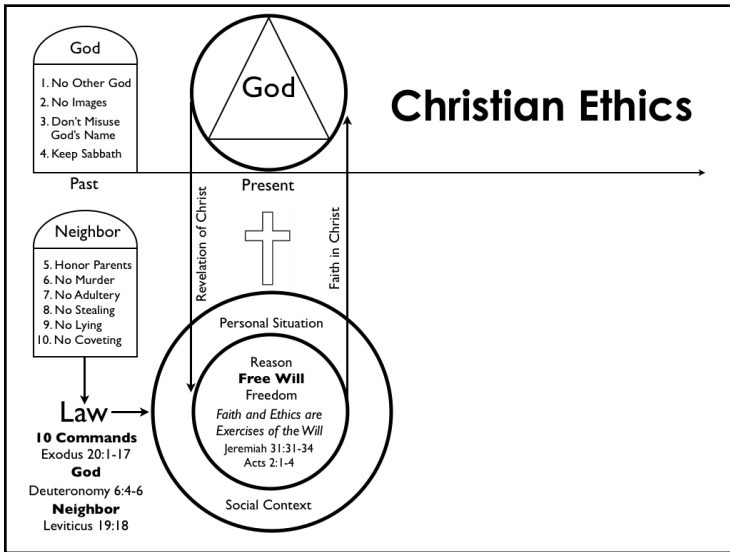
---

<sup>49</sup> See Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 6:4-6 and Leviticus 19:18.



There are, of course, consequences for such rebellion, but we can do it. We have free will and we can accept what we have been taught, or we can rebel against it and choose another path. Faith and Ethics are exercises of Free Will.

### 3. The Revelation of God in Christ



As I look around at the various religious leaders of the past I come to a third assumption: God revealed himself in Jesus Christ. I agree with what Paul wrote in Colossians 1:15:

He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation: for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers— all things have been created through him and for him.

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection reflect not only the perfect image of God, but also the perfect image of what humanity was created to be. When it comes to Jesus' ethical or moral teachings, Jesus does not reject the Law of Moses; he claims to fulfill it. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus says, "Do not

think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” The Law is still the source of Jewish and Christian Ethics, but now it will be inscribed not in stone tablets, but in the human heart. Jeremiah describes the new morality, which is the fulfillment of the old morality, but both have to do with the Law.

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.<sup>50</sup>

Jesus assumed that this time would come for his disciples with the descent of the Holy Spirit at the second Pentecost. At the first Pentecost God gave the Law through Moses. At the second Pentecost God inscribed the Law into the hearts of those who responded to Christ in faith. Jesus promised this Spirit and said to his disciples, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth....”<sup>51</sup> This Spirit is at work in all true disciples. In *The Letter to Diognetus*, this new ethic was explained in terms of how the early Christians understood their relationship to the Law. The author of *The Letter to Diognetus* wrote of the early Spirit filled Christians: “They obey the laws that men make, but their lives are better than the laws.”<sup>52</sup>

---

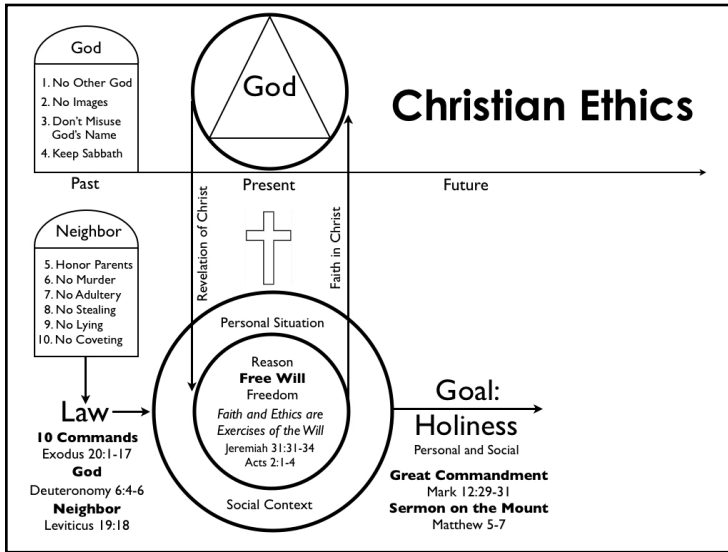
<sup>50</sup> Jeremiah 31:33-34 NRSV

<sup>51</sup> Acts 2 and John 16:12-13 NRSV

<sup>52</sup> Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christian Ethics*, New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1955, p. 68.

## 4. The Goal of the Moral Life is Holiness

My fourth assumption is that the goal of the Law is Personal and Social Holiness or Christian Perfection, which



is Perfect Love. I didn't say that we could achieve it, only that it is the goal of the Christian life. This becomes clear in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and in his answer to the scribe as to which commandment is the greatest of all. Jesus simply quoted the commandment to love God with one's heart, soul, mind and strength, which was a quote from Deuteronomy 6:4-6. The scribe didn't ask for a second commandment, but Jesus gave it to him anyway. "The second is this," said Jesus: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The second commandment came from Leviticus 19:18, the Holiness Code. These two commandments describe Personal and Social Holiness, which is the goal of both Judaism and Christianity.

The Ten Commandments are simply an expansion of the two greatest commandments. The first four commandments



describe love for God and the remaining six describe our relationships with one another. Jesus came to fulfill these laws and he did this by going beyond the letter of the Law and interpreting the spirit of the Law. While Jesus doesn't do this with all ten commandments, he does give us a few examples to make clear to us how we are to obey the Law. He then points us to the goal of the Law.

The two clearest examples have to do with murder and adultery, both of which have to do with how we are not to treat one another. In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment...." When it comes to adultery, Jesus said in Matthew 5:27, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Although Jesus does not deal with all of the commandments, he makes his point. There is a difference between the letter of the law and the spirit or intent of the Law. He certainly makes obedience of the Law more difficult than did Moses, but he takes us a step further by dealing specifically with the goal of the Law—Perfect Love. We are not only to love our neighbor, but we are to love our enemy as well; otherwise, we are no better than tax collectors and Gentiles.<sup>53</sup> In Matthew 5:48, Jesus concludes, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." He could have said, "Be holy, as your heavenly Father is holy."<sup>54</sup> Personal and Social Holiness have to do with loving God with our whole being and loving our neighbor as we ought to love

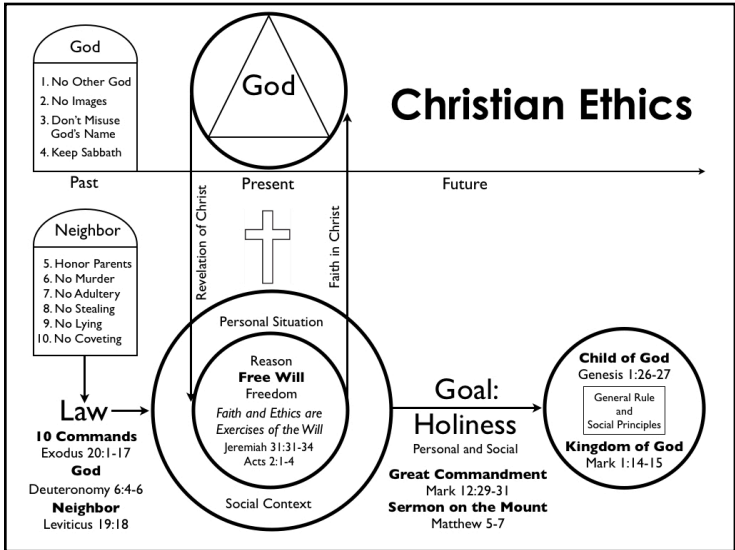
---

<sup>53</sup> See Matthew 5:43-38

<sup>54</sup> See Leviticus 19:2 and 1 Peter 1:16

ourselves. This makes the Golden Rule comprehensible and a guide to moral behavior. In Matthew 7:12, Jesus summed it all up: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.” It’s important to include the prophets, for they also interpreted the spirit and intent of the Law.

Eventually, faith and ethics merge, for they have the same goal. The goal is to become children of God in the Kingdom of God. This will take the restoration of the image of God in us. Since this is what Salvation is all about, I plan to continue along these lines in a future chapter on Scriptural Salvation. The completed diagram follows:





## **5. BEYOND THE LAW**

### **Applying the Right Principles**

I began with Divine Law as the foundation of Christian Ethics, but Jesus' interpretation of that Law, forces us to view the Law more as Principles to guide us. The Great Commandment and the Golden Rule look more like Principles than Laws. The value of Principles is that they are more flexible, permitting us to go beyond the letter of the Law, focusing on the spirit or intent of the Law, with the goal being Perfect Love or Personal and Social Holiness. The difficulty lies in applying these principles in a context that does not always lend itself to an easy application.

In aiming at Personal and Social Holiness, that is Perfect Love, we are acknowledging that we were made in the image of God and that we have marred that image.<sup>55</sup> Only as that image has been restored will we be capable of applying the

---

<sup>55</sup> Genesis 1:26-27

Law and Jesus' principles to our personal and social life. It is extremely important to have the image restored. It is part of our preparation for living in the Kingdom of God.<sup>56</sup> Applying principles is no easy task. John Wesley tried it with his General Rules. His purpose was to provide three simple rules, which were:

1. Do no harm!
2. Do all the good you can!
3. Attend all the ordinances of God!<sup>57</sup>

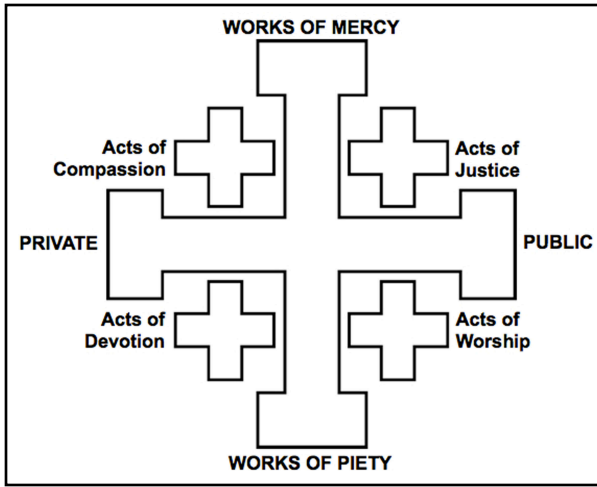
Wesley wanted to keep these three simple rules brief, but he also wanted to provide enough detail to make them helpful. They were to be carried in one's pocket, where they would always be available to give guidance. That these General Rules went through thirty-nine revisions should speak for itself. After Wesley's death, they were frozen in time, only to become irrelevant. The three simple rules may still be relevant, but the details, need constant updating. Wesley knew they needed updating and he also knew that he needed help in revising them. That's one of the reasons why he gathered his preachers together to engage in Holy Conferencing.

It's important for Christians to gather together in small groups to share both their theological and moral insights. Theology and Ethics cannot be separated. To deal with the irrelevance of the General Rules, David Lowes Watson came up with a New General Rule:

---

<sup>56</sup> Mark 1:14-15

<sup>57</sup> *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008), pp. 72-74.



To witness to Jesus Christ in the world,  
 and to follow his teachings through  
 acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion,  
 under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>58</sup>

The New General Rule ties Theology and Ethics together and clarifies both our theological and moral goals; however, the New General Rule does not offer any details. Applying these principles takes place in small groups where participants share their theological and ethical insights with one another, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>59</sup>

But what about the details? Don't we need help in applying these principles to the context or environment in which we live? What if the members of our small group are not under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and we end up simply sharing our ignorance or biases? That's where Holy Conferencing comes in, whether it is done in a spiritual or a

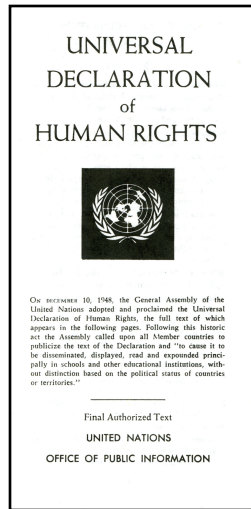
---

<sup>58</sup> David Lowes Watson, *Covenant Discipleship* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1998), p. 78.

<sup>59</sup> I'll have more to say about this in Chapter 10, "Organizing for Mission."

secular context. Most churches state their theological beliefs and their moral positions. The same is true of nations, whether they support a State Church or Religion, or whether they separate the State from the Church or Religion.

Even secular Nations make moral decisions to guide their citizens. On December 10, 1948 the United Nations produced the “*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*,” calling upon all member nations to publicize the full text without distinction based on the political status of the nation. The document, like Wesley’s General Rules, is inexpensive and can be placed in anyone’s pocket or purse. It is a helpful guide in both a secular and a spiritual context.



Churches also produce similar documents to offer guidance in the application of principles. In United Methodism there are the “Social Principles,” a much longer document, which is revised every four years at General Conference. This document is designed to deal with the details and contexts of moral issues.

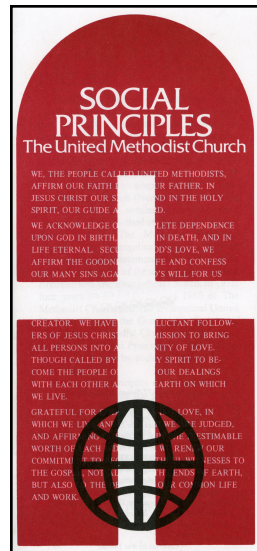
### **Applying the Principles to Controversial Issues**

The difficulty with principles is applying them to controversial issues. Let’s take a look at four controversial issues: gay marriage, abortion, capital punishment, and war. Although I’m looking at them from a Christian perspective, I will begin by looking at them from Natural Law. To do this I will begin with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, drawn up by the United Nations in 1948. While these principles, for the most part, are compatible with Christianity, they don’t mention Christianity at all. I realize that others will draw different conclusions. Principles are not as precise

as laws and my intent is to go beyond the law, getting at the intent or the heart of the law. Christians are supposed to live lives better than the law. Not everything that's legal is moral, nor is everything that's moral legal. The Christian aims at the will of God, not the laws of the world. My operating principle will be my perception of the will of God. If my theology is wrong, so might my ethics be mistaken; nevertheless, I will proceed as best I can, beginning with Gay Marriage.

**Gay Marriage.** At this point I'm not interested in claiming that homosexuality is genetic or a choice. We know that a certain percentage of the population claims to be gay. They feel an attraction for persons of the same gender. The big question is, Did God create them to be homosexual? Even if genetics caused them to be homosexual, that does not mean God decided to create a certain percentage of the population to be homosexual. Natural Law points to the necessity of two genders to marry and found a family. Article 16 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states: "Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality, or religion, have the right to marry and found a family."<sup>60</sup>

When we come to Divine Law, we look to the teachings of Jesus and the Scriptures. While Jesus says nothing about homosexuality, he does have something to say about marriage. He says it in the context of his teaching about divorce, but he does define marriage.



<sup>60</sup> *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information), p. 5.

Some Pharisees asked Jesus, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” Jesus answered them,

Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?” So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.<sup>61</sup>

Marriage is between a man and a woman. That’s what it takes to reproduce. This does not mean that all married couples must reproduce, nor does it mean that every person must marry. Jesus was single and he never commanded anyone to marry or have children. The traditional marriage ceremony in the Book of Common Prayer, gives three reasons for marriage. They are as follows:

First, It was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord.... Secondly, It was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication.... Thirdly, It was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.<sup>62</sup>

I believe that the first purpose of marriage is for the procreation of children. The difficulty with appealing to the traditional marriage ceremony is that there is also a contemporary marriage ceremony in the Book of Common Prayer, which turns the whole thing upside down. The more contemporary service states the purpose of marriage as follows:

---

<sup>61</sup> Matthew 19:3-6 (NRSV).

<sup>62</sup> *Book of Common Prayer Online*.



The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord.<sup>63</sup>

Gay persons have rights like everyone else, but do they have the right to enter into marriage? As we can see from the two different marriage ceremonies within the same church, Christians will continue to disagree on gay marriage. Making gay marriage legal, however, does not make it moral. I choose to follow the traditional reasons for marriage because I believe them to be Biblical.

What can we then say about homosexuality? It was not God's intention in creation. It's an aberration. In Biology, an aberration is defined as a characteristic that deviates from the normal. Homosexuality is not the only aberration in creation, but it is an aberration. But is it a sin? I would not call it a sin, but I would say that it is incompatible with Christian teaching. The primary purpose of marriage is reproduction.

**Abortion.** The primary purpose of sexual intercourse is reproduction. Article 16 (3) of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states: "The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State."<sup>64</sup> Couples who don't want to raise children should use means of birth control which prevent conception. Abortion is not one of those legitimate means of birth control or gender selection, which prevents conception.

There are times when an abortion is justified, such as when the pregnancy threatens the life and well-being of the

---

<sup>63</sup> *Book of Common Prayer Online.*

<sup>64</sup> *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information), p. 5.

mother. This would be the primary justification for an abortion. Some secondary justifications might include rape and incest, which certainly threaten the well-being of the mother.

Does every woman have a right to choose an abortion for any reason? Jesus isn't very helpful on this point, but both the Law of the Hebrew Covenant and Jesus agree that we should, "Love our neighbor as we love ourselves."<sup>65</sup> Does this include a fetus as a neighbor?

When does human life begin? Does it begin at conception or at birth? What about partial-birth abortions? Does human life begin somewhere between conception and birth? The only safe conclusion one can draw, if one wants to make a decision based on the will of God is that life begins at conception. All life is sacred and entitled to protection by the State. If an abortion is necessary or justified, it should only be done under proper medical procedures and after medical and pastoral, or appropriate, counsel.

**Capital Punishment.** If Christians are obligated to view life as sacred at conception, what about the lives of criminals and murderers? Is there a place for capital punishment, or does that need to be rejected? The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states in Article 11(1)

Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.<sup>66</sup>

If a person is found guilty, Article 5 states: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading

---

<sup>65</sup> Leviticus 19:18 and Mark 12:31 (NRSV).

<sup>66</sup> *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information), p. 4.

treatment or punishment.”<sup>67</sup> Nothing is said about capital punishment.

When we turn to Scripture, we find capital punishment justified in the Hebrew Covenant, and although we see examples of capital punishment being carried out in the Christian Covenant, we don’t find it justified. One could say that Jesus confirmed capital punishment when he said in Matthew 5:17, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” What does it mean to fulfill the laws on capital punishment?

While Jesus never rejected capital punishment, he did forgive a dying thief on the cross.<sup>68</sup> The difficulty with capital punishment is that it denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore and transform convicted persons; therefore, in most cases, the death penalty should be eliminated. Too many mistakes have been made where innocent persons have been put to death. If it is ever to be used, the crime and the guilt must be clear beyond any doubt.

Should capital punishment ever be used? When the choice is between life in prison without parole, or death, life in prison might seem more cruel than death. The convicted person might be given the choice. The Romans executed criminals by means of crucifixion, Judaism and Islam did it by stoning. Both methods seem inhuman and degrading. Other methods, such as hanging, the electric chair, gas, and injection have been used. Neither Natural Law nor Scripture is very helpful here, but it seems as if death by injection is the most humane method. If the crime is heinous, the convicted person should be given the choice: life in prison without parole, or death by injection.

---

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> See Luke 23:43.

**War.** The third paragraph of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states that if we want to avoid being compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.<sup>69</sup> In the Books of the Hebrew Covenant, war is common. God is even portrayed as the one who commands his people to take the Promised Land by force. After naming in detail the abominations that the people in that land had committed, God gives the Hebrews the following warning;

But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and commit none of these abominations, either the citizen or the alien who resides among you (for the inhabitants of the land, who were before you, committed all of these abominations, and the land became defiled); otherwise the land will vomit you out for defiling it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you.<sup>70</sup>

The primary cause of war or revolution is the disregard and contempt for human rights, but does the violation of human rights justify war or revolution? When we come to the Christian Covenant, we find the expectation that Jesus would lead a revolt against Rome, but Jesus disappointed that expectation. Jesus did realize that his message conflicted not only with his own people, but also with the Roman Empire. He was condemned by the Jews for breaking the Law and he was crucified by the Romans for sedition. Had the Jews executed Jesus, they would have stoned him.

Was Jesus a pacifist? The only answer that can be given from the Christian Covenant is, “Yes.” Did he teach pacifism? He at least taught it by example. Christians refused

---

<sup>69</sup> *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Leviticus 18:26-29 (NRSV)

to join the police force and the army for the first three hundred years. Only after Christianity became the State Religion, did Christians accept the responsibility to serve in the military. In order to justify their military involvement, Augustine came up with the idea of the Just War. Others, such as Thomas Aquinas, refined the idea that wars could be fought by using Christian principles. Below is a concise definition of Just War theory:

Normally there are seven conditions of a just war. The cause for which the war is conducted must be just; the just purpose must remain during hostilities; the war must have the intention of establishing a good or correcting an evil; it must be waged by acceptable means; war must only be a last resort; victory must be assured; and the war must be aimed at peace.<sup>71</sup>

I might add that Just War can only be declared by a legitimate ruler or government. Another principle not mentioned in the above definition has to do with distinguishing between combatants and civilians. Nuclear weapons have made it impossible to adhere to all of the Just War Principles.

The only conclusion we can reach is that war is incompatible with Christian teaching. If this is the case, how can Christians involve themselves in war? The answer lies in how we define sin. There are sins of commission and sins of omission. When Christians participate in war, they commit the sin of commission, but if human rights are violated, and they choose not to participate in war, they commit the sin of omission. This brings up another principle that applies not only to the problem of war, but to many other ethical dilemmas as well. Sometimes we have no alternative but to choose between the lesser of two evils. We may wish that our

---

<sup>71</sup> *Eerdman's Handbook of Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), p. 292.

choice would be between good and evil, but sometimes good is not one of the choices.

While self-defense is generally considered a legitimate reason for going to war, it is more difficult to go to war over violations of human rights. How many human rights need to be violated before a war is justified? Genocide is generally considered a reason for going to war, but how many people have to be killed before war is declared? If no war can be called just, when does war become a necessary evil?

A final remark I'd like to make has to do with the sixth commandment. This commandment is not a negation of killing in war time. The commandment should read, "Thou shalt not murder!" It has to do with unlawful killing.

### **Conclusion**

I chose the above moral issues because they are controversial. I did not choose them because they are the most important moral issues. Some of the least controversial issues may be more important, but I wanted to make a point. Even Christians sometimes disagree with one another. In such cases, what shall we do? In his sermon on "A Catholic Spirit," Wesley affirms our mutual love of God, and then he turns to how we should love our neighbor and what to do when we disagree with one another:

Is your heart right toward your neighbor? Do you love as yourself, all mankind without exception? "If you love those only that love you, what reward do you have?" Do you "love your enemies?" Is your soul full of good-will, of tender affection toward them? Do you love even the enemies of God, the unthankful and unholy? Does your heart yearn over them? Could you "wish yourself" temporally "accursed" for their sake? And do you show this by "blessing them that curse you, and praying for those that despitefully use you, and persecute you?"

Do you show your love by your works? As you have time and opportunity, do you in fact “do good to all men,” neighbors or strangers, friends or enemies, good or bad? Do you do them all the good you can, endeavoring to supply all their needs, assisting them both in body and soul, to the uttermost of your power? If you are thus minded (may every Christian say, yes), if you are but sincerely desirous of it, and following on until you attain, then “your heart is right, as my heart is with your heart.”

“If it be, give me your hand.” I do not mean, “Be of my opinion.” You need not. I do not expect or desire it. Neither do I mean, “I will be of your opinion.” I cannot, it does not depend on my choice. I can no more think, than I can see or hear, as I will. Keep your opinion and I will keep mine, and that as steadily as ever. You need not even endeavor to come over to me, or bring me over to you. I do not desire you to dispute those points, or to hear or speak one word concerning them. Leave all opinions alone on one side and the other: only “give me your hand.”<sup>72</sup>

Let me go back to the beginning. Theology and Ethics cannot be separated. Bad Theology leads to bad Ethics. The source of all Ethical reflection must be the Ten Commandments, which can be divided into two parts. The first four commandments deal with Theology and our personal relationship with God. The final six commandments deal with Ethics and our relationship with one another.

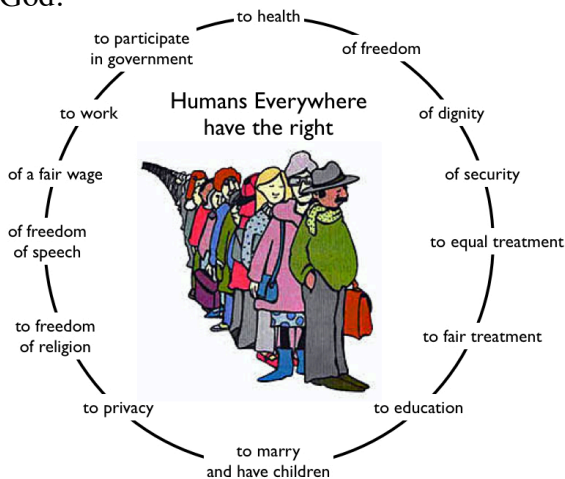
When Jesus was asked to name the greatest of the commandments, he named the first as loving God, the first

---

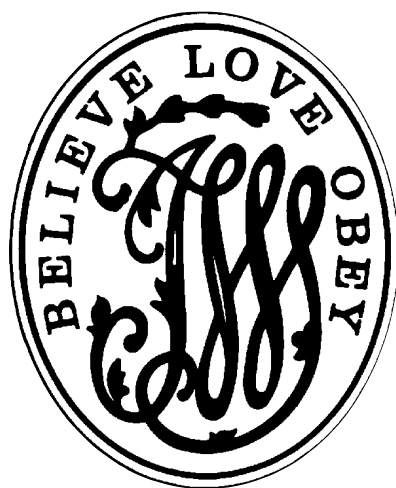
<sup>72</sup> John Wesley, “A Catholic Spirit,” Forty-Four Sermons (The Epworth Press, 1964), pp. 449-450. The passages was updated with modern English.

four commandments, and the second as loving the neighbor (including the enemy), the final six commandments. Jesus, however, isn't satisfied with the letter of the Law, so he makes them more difficult to obey by suggesting the importance of obeying the spirit or intent of the commandments. He introduces the Golden Rule as a principle to follow. The goal is Personal and Social Holiness, that is Christian Perfection, or Perfect Love. In preparation for the Kingdom of God, we need to be re-created in the Image of God. We need a New Birth. The New General Rule offers us guidance and our Social Principles help us with the details. Natural Law, as articulated in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, is also helpful, especially where Natural Law and Divine Law agree.

In the end, we are rational beings with freedom to make our own choices. Faith and morality is an exercise of Free Will. At the same time we need the help of the Holy Spirit and other people as we make our theological and ethical decisions. If we make bad decisions in faith and morality, then we need a new birth. Since we are likely to make mistakes in this area of our lives, we must turn to a discussion of salvation or the restoration in our lives of the Image of God.







## 6. SCRIPTURAL SALVATION

### Complex or Simple?

John Wesley began his sermon, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” by contrasting the complexity with the simplicity of Religion. “Nothing can be more intricate, complex, and hard to understand,” wrote Wesley, “than religion as it has been often described.”<sup>73</sup> Having pointed to its complexities, Wesley concluded, “Yet how easy to be understood, how plain and simple a thing, is the genuine religion of Jesus Christ.”<sup>74</sup> In Wesley’s classic, *Forty-Four Sermons*, thirteen of them are on the teachings of Jesus as they have been recorded in the Sermon on the Mount. Anyone who has read some of Wesley’s sermons, realizes that they are far from

---

<sup>73</sup> John Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” in Steven W. Manskar, *Accountable Discipleship: Living in God’s Household* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2000), p. 119.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

simple; and yet, he deals in those thirteen sermons with the essence of Jesus' teachings, which are easy to understand, but difficult to put into practice.

Wesley begins by asking the question, "Who are you?" He gives the following answer, which seems very simple.

There are three basic types of people in the world. Each of us is one of the three. The first is one who is in a state of mind without fear of God or love of others. In the Scripture this is termed "a natural man." Next is one who is under the spirit of bondage and fear. This state is sometimes called "being under the law."... In our times, all who attempt to please God by their good works or right actions are under a law of their own. The last is the one who has exchanged the spirit of fear for the Spirit of love That person is properly said to be under grace.<sup>75</sup>

After describing each kind of person, Wesley gives the following summary:

The natural man neither fears nor loves God. Man under the law fears God. Man under grace loves God. The first has no light in the things of God and walks in utter darkness. The second sees the painful picture of hell. The third sees and enjoys the joyous light of Heaven. He that sleeps in death has a false peace. He that is awakened has no peace at all. He that believes has true peace—the peace of God filling and ruling his heart.<sup>76</sup>

Sincerity is not the issue. "A man may be sincere in any of these states. Man may be sincere not only when he has the

---

<sup>75</sup> John Wesley, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Bridge-Logos, 2010), p. 29.

<sup>76</sup> John Wesley, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 42.

Holy Spirit, but when he has the spirit of bondage and fear.”<sup>77</sup> To complicate matters more, common experience shows that all three states are frequently mixed. The essential question is, “What is the ruling principle of one’s soul?”<sup>78</sup> To discover this principle, we must wake up. “Few men,” says Wesley, “are so fast asleep in sin that they cannot sometimes be more or less awakened.”<sup>79</sup>

### **What is Salvation?**

Wesley’s definition of Salvation, however, is simple to understand; and so I’d like to quote two parts of his definition. He begins in the first part with the following question and an answer:

What is Salvation? The salvation which is here spoken of is not what is frequently understood by that word, the going to heaven, eternal happiness. ... It is not something at a distance: it is a present thing, a blessing which, through the free mercy of God, ye are now in possession of.<sup>80</sup>

Having defined what salvation is not, Wesley proceeds to define what it is. He uses some theological words which I would like to avoid until later; and yet, his definition without those words, is clear.<sup>81</sup>

Nay, the words may be rendered, and that with equal propriety, “Ye *have been* saved.” So that the salvation which is here spoken of might be extended to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in

---

<sup>77</sup> John Wesley, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 42.

<sup>78</sup> John Wesley, *The Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>79</sup> John Wesley, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 43.

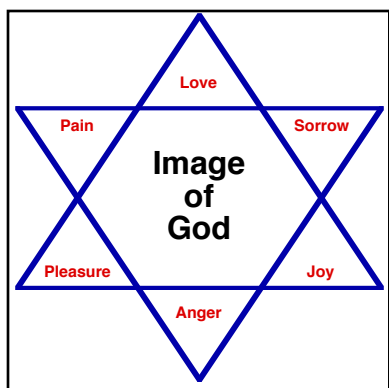
<sup>80</sup> John Wesley, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, p. 120.

<sup>81</sup> The words are Preventing Grace, Justifying Grace, and Sanctifying Grace.

the soul till it is consummated in glory. ... It is thus that we wait for...a full salvation from all our sins, from pride, self-will, anger, unbelief, or, as the Apostle expresses it. "Go on to perfection." But what is perfection? The word has various senses: here it means perfect love. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. It is love "rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks."<sup>82</sup>

### The Image of God

Having defined Salvation, I would like to move on to the goal and way of Salvation.<sup>83</sup> To do this will require a definition of the Image of God, since Salvation will require a restoration of that Image. In Genesis 1:27, we read, "So God



created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them." Both the Hebrew and Christian Covenants indicate that we have lost, or at least marred that Image. The goal is to restore that Image, but for that to happen, we need to know what it is.

Being made in the Image of God does not mean we look like God. It means something far deeper than our physical existence, I have encountered two attempts to define the Image of God, which make sense to me. I found the first definition outlined on the Star of David in Jerusalem.

---

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>83</sup> I agree with Wesley's definition of salvation.

It's very simple to understand. We have opposing feelings just like God, but we lack control over our feelings. There are three sets of opposing feelings. They are as follows:

First Set	Second Set	Third Set
Compassionate Love	Exuberant Joy	Intense Pleasure
Fiery Anger	Extreme Sorrow	Deep Pain

These feelings and emotions are certainly expressed by God in the stories of the Hebrew Covenant, but they are also descriptive of God in various portions of the Christian Covenant. If we look deeply into ourselves, we will recognize the same feelings and emotions. What may be more difficult for us to recognize is what needs restoration in us to be more like the intended Image of God.

The second Image of God that makes sense to me is one described by Dr. Theodore Runyon in his book, *The New Creation: Wesley's Theology for Today*. Dr. Runyon describes Wesley's understanding of being made in the Image of God. The Image of God, as Wesley understood it, can best be...

described as a vocation or calling to which human beings are called, the fulfillment of which constitutes their true destiny. Because it is not innate, the image can be distorted, or forfeited or betrayed. It resides not so much in the creature as in the way the creature lives out his or her relation to the Creator....<sup>84</sup>

Humanity images God in three ways, as the natural image, the political image, and the moral image. The first of

---

<sup>84</sup> Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), pp. 13-14.

these, the natural image, consists of those endowments which make us capable of entering into a conscious relationship with God. Just as God is Spirit, so the image of God is spirit. As spirit the image is endowed with understanding (reason), will (or volition), and freedom (or liberty).<sup>85</sup>

The political image is the second way in which humanity reflects its Creator. God has endowed humanity with faculties for leadership and management to be God's "vicegerent upon earth, the prince and governor of this lower world." Thus humanity is the image of God insofar as the benevolence of God is reflected in human actions towards the rest of creation.<sup>86</sup> In short, humanity takes on the role of steward and caretaker of creation. This role includes all of God's creatures and the whole environment.

The third characteristic of the image of God is the moral image, which is the chief mark of our relationship to God. This is the one that is most easily distorted. Humanity's exercise of the moral image depends on receiving from God what we cannot give ourselves. It is not simply a question of obeying moral rules, but of entering into a relationship with God in which we receive love, justice and mercy; and in return, to communicate what we have received. Wesley called this "spiritual respiration."<sup>87</sup>

To sum up, the natural image consists of endowments, most of which are retained in humanity, although they have been marred by humanity's fall. The political image is one which humanity continues to exercise, but in corrupted fashion, reflecting arrogance, selfishness, and insecurity in a fallen world. The moral image is neither a capacity within humanity nor a function that can be carried out independently

---

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

of the Creator. It consists in a relationship with the Creator, who is full of justice, mercy and truth. Adam and Eve (and all humanity) were filled with those same characteristics as they came from the hands of their creator.<sup>88</sup> To humanity is given the crucial role, as the natural image, the political image, and the moral image, to reflect the Creator and to mediate His divine blessings. When we look at this image of God, it is easy to see why humanity needs salvation.

### **The Image of God and the Cross**

The first question we must ask is, “Can the Image of God be restored in us?” Some would say, “No” and others would say, “Yes.” Others might say, “Yes, but not in this world.”

Let’s deal first with those who would say, “No!” They would point to the Fall of human nature, symbolized by the Fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Like them, we live in a fallen world and the Image of God will never be restored in this world; and besides, it’s not all that necessary for Christians. Jesus died on the cross and our sins are forgiven, even if the Image of God has not been restored in us. The cross is a kind of filter through which God looks at us, and what he sees are forgiven sinners. Jesus’ death on the cross makes us whiter than snow, even if the Image of God has not been restored in part or in whole.

Now let’s look at those who would say, “Yes!” How do they view the cross? Is the cross even necessary? The cross would not have been necessary if everyone would have listened to Jesus and followed his teachings; but of course, that didn’t happen. The Image of God was marred and destroyed, but it can be restored, at least in individuals. The cross is not a filter through which God views sinful human beings, seeing them as righteous when they are not. The cross has a role, but it’s not a filter. When we look at the cross, we

---

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

see God and we are transformed. Isaac Watts captured the moment in one of the greatest hymns ever written:

When I survey the wondrous cross  
on which the Prince of Glory died,  
my richest gain I count but loss,  
and pour contempt on all my pride.<sup>89</sup>

I don't mean to imply that *one look at the seriousness of the cross* will completely restore in us the Image of God, but I do believe it can start the process. We are indeed moving from the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem. We may still be in the wilderness, but the one who hung on the cross points us in the right direction. In Mark 2:15, Jesus calls us to repent and get ready for the coming Kingdom of God, and in the Beatitudes, he describes the blessedness of being a citizen of the Kingdom within this world.<sup>90</sup> He was calling for the restoration of the Image of God in us within this world, in preparation for what is coming. As the Sermon on the Mount continues, Jesus outlines what a restoration of the Image of God would look like. He really expects his followers to be transformed and begin the process of having the Image of God restored in them and in us.

---

<sup>89</sup> "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), #298.

<sup>90</sup> See the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12.





## **7. THE WAY OF SALVATION**

In outlining the way of salvation, I'm not talking about the way into heaven. Only God knows who will make it and who will not make it; and according to Matthew 25:31-46, there will be plenty of surprises. In my opinion, salvation has to do with the restoration of the Image of God in us in this world. This prepares us for the New Jerusalem. We don't want to be surprised. We want to hear God say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

### **Three Steps in the Way of Salvation**

**1. Seeking Grace.** The first step in the way of salvation is to hear clearly what God is trying to say to us in Jesus of Nazareth. The heart of the Gospel, the Good News, is clear and simple and easy to understand. John 3:16 says it all: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." To believe in Jesus of Nazareth is to believe in his teachings and to begin to follow them, beginning with the

Great Commandment to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves and as Jesus loved us.<sup>91</sup> Beyond this first step, we need to become familiar with the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, both of which will show us the way to be transformed and to let God restore his Image in us. The process will take the rest of our life. We will not begin this process until we know that God loves us. Paul affirmed God's love for us in Romans 5:8, when he wrote, "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." We don't have to earn God's love. In fact we can't earn God's love. Grace then, is God's unearned gift of love to us, which brings me to my second step in the way of salvation.

**2. Responding Faith.** The second step is our response to God, which is the step of faith. God's love to us can be summarized in a single word: Grace. At this point we come face to face with the relationship between faith and works. Do we accept God's love by faith or through works? "Faith alone," cried Luther, and most of Protestantism agrees with him, but faith is not unrelated to works. The Scripture most often quoted to support the idea of Salvation by faith alone is Ephesians 2:8-9, but one must not exclude verse 10. The whole passage defines the relationship of God's Grace to human Faith and Works.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Those who respond to God's Grace in Faith, will experience such a transformation of their hearts and minds,

---

<sup>91</sup> See both Mark 12:28-31 and John 13:34-35.

that Works will become the fruit of the Faith that has been touched and transformed by Grace. Luther illustrated the relationship as follows:

Faith is a living and unshakeable confidence, a belief in the grace of God so assured that a man would die a thousand deaths for its sake. ... Hence, the man of faith, without being driven, willingly and gladly seeks to do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of hardships, for the sake of the love and glory of the God who has shown him such grace. It is impossible, indeed, to separate works from faith, just as it is impossible, indeed, to separate heat and light from fire.<sup>92</sup>

**3. *Spiritual Growth.*** The third step in the way of salvation has to do with spiritual transformation and growth, to the point in which the Image of God is restored in us. That Image may not be completely restored in our lifetime, but the process of transformation will begin and we will experience real growth. The Apostle Paul is the best example. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, he describes what happens to those who experience Grace and respond in Faith: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” Paul knew that spiritual transformation and growth were not instantaneous. That’s why he appealed to the Christians in Rome to submit themselves to God as living sacrifices.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so

---

<sup>92</sup> Martin Luther, *Introduction to his Commentary on the Book of Romans.*

that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.<sup>93</sup>

Holiness or Christian Perfection is the goal of Salvation. Christians don't conform to this world, but to the coming Kingdom of God, which is already breaking into this world. Salvation, that is, the restoration of the Image of God in us, takes place as we experience God's Grace, as revealed in the teachings and life of Jesus Christ. We need to respond to that Grace by Faith. That response will result in spiritual transformation and growth, eventually resulting in the complete restoration of the Image of God in us.

What about nonChristians? I don't have any answers. Only God can answer such a question, but I do know this much. The restoration of the Image of God is as necessary for nonChristians as it is for Christians. No one enters the New Jerusalem without a restored Image of God. In the New Jerusalem the doors will stand wide open and evil will be nonexistent. That's why salvation, the restoration of the Image of God, is necessary.

### **Salvation Illustrated**

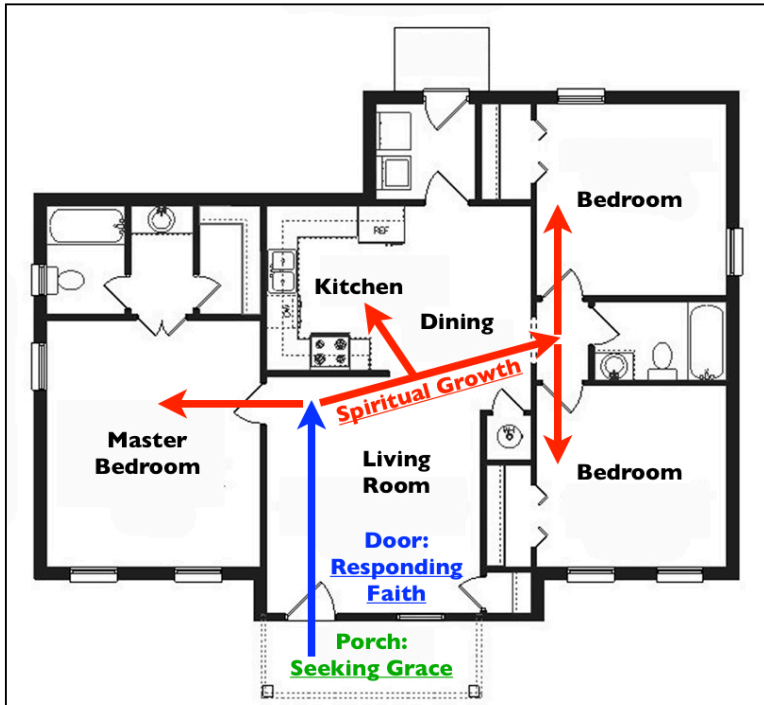
Let's suppose that we are all houses, which God wants to set in the midst of the New Jerusalem. God knows what kinds of houses that will fit into this New Jerusalem he is building, and if the house does not fit in, then it needs to be remodeled. In some cases, this would require gutting the entire house and starting over. The house would need to be rebuilt in order to be suitable for the New Jerusalem. God already has the blue prints for the houses he would like to include in the New Jerusalem. The *Image of God* is that blueprint.

God sends his Master Builder to the houses that need remodeling. The Master Builder approaches the house, stands

---

<sup>93</sup> Romans 12:1-2 (NRSV).

on the porch and knocks on the door or rings the doorbell to gain entrance into the house. As the owner of the house, we don't have to open the front door, but opening that door is necessary. The Master Builder wants to enter our house. He is seeking to make our house into a better place to live. This is the first step in Salvation, which I have chosen to call *Seeking Grace*. We didn't ask the Master Builder to come, and we don't have sufficient funds to pay for a total renovation of our house, which he wants to do.



We are free to let the Master Builder in or leave him standing on the porch. If we don't let him in, eventually he might go away. If we choose to let him in, we are beginning the second step in Salvation, which I would call *Responding Faith*. Letting him in assumes that we would like a little remodeling to take place around the house.

Now comes the hard part. What if the Master Builder looks around and says that the whole place needs a complete renovation? That may instill a little inconvenience into our lives. We may have to move the furniture around in order to make space available for the complete renovation. We might only want one room renovated, but the Master Builder wants all the rooms to conform to his blueprints. After all, this house will be set in the midst of the New Jerusalem. This third step is called *Spiritual Growth*.

Let's take another look at the blueprints that the Master Builder holds in his hands. I have already described the Image of God, which is the blueprint, in two ways. In the first description of the Image of God, I suggested that it consisted of three contrasting sets of feelings, which are love and anger, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain. While we all have these feelings, Christians and nonChristians alike, none of us can say that we always express them appropriately.

The second set of blueprints consists of our natural capacity to exercise free will, our political function to be good stewards of God's creation, and our moral relationship to obey God and keep his Covenant. When we take a good hard look at both of these descriptions of the Image of God, in which we have been created, it becomes self-evident that our house needs a total and complete renovation and that things will be a little inconvenient as the renovation begins, but begin it must, or we won't fit into the New Jerusalem.

Up to this point I have described the Image of God in fairly general terms, most of which could be interpreted and applied in the context of any of the World Religions. I introduced the Master Builder, whom for Christians would be Jesus of Nazareth. I have called him the perfect Image of God.<sup>94</sup> If he is the perfect Image of God, and I believe he is,

---

<sup>94</sup> See Colossians 1:15-16.

how did he describe the Image of God. Did he have a blueprint for his followers? I believe that he did and we find that blueprint in the opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount. His blueprint consists of the Beatitudes.

### **The Blueprints: The Beatitudes**

Technically what follows is not taken from one sermon; rather, it represents the teachings of Jesus taken from many sermons or teaching situations. Jesus traditionally retreated into the mountains in order to escape the crowds. This seems to be the case here. He did not go into a mountain to gain a better vantage point, but to withdraw from the crowds. He sat down, as was the custom of Jewish teachers, and he shared with his disciples his vision of the Kingdom of God. Matthew's version is an extension of what we find in the Gospel of Luke, where the sermon is on the plain to a great crowd. In the Beatitudes we find a blueprint for living or the restoration of the Image of God.

The Beatitudes consist of eight descriptions of that which brings blessedness or fulfillment in life. The Beatitudes are, a blueprint for living the Christian life on earth, in preparation for the Kingdom of God, also described as the New Jerusalem. Although there are eight Beatitudes, they have different functions. To illustrate those functions, I will divide them into three parts, and give a brief interpretation of each Beatitude.

#### ***Conditions for Spiritual Perception***

*The Poor in Spirit (Matthew 5:3)* The poor in Spirit are not those who are spiritually weak, but those who, like the Psalmist (Psalm 34), do not live out of their own resources, but rely upon God alone. Poverty of Spirit is best described as humility (Isaiah 66:2).

*Those Who Mourn (5:4)* Those who mourn are not simply grieving over the loss of a loved one, but bewail the present

state of affairs in the world. They long for the coming of the Kingdom of God, in which they will find their comfort.

### ***Characteristics of the Christian Life***

*The Meek (5:5)* Both Moses (Numbers 12:3) and Jesus have been described as meek, and so meekness cannot be equated with weakness. It would be better to say that the meek are gentle but firm. This beatitude is not new with Jesus, but was already described in Psalm 37:11.

*The Righteous (5:6)* The emphasis is clearly on those who hunger and thirst for (seek) righteousness. Matthew 6:33, confirms this beatitude and places it at the center of the Christian life.

*The Merciful (5:7)* Mercy is only available to those who express mercy, and those who express it find that mercy blesses those who express it and those who receive it. No one has expressed this double joy like Shakspeare in *The Merchant of Venice*, Act 4, Scene 1:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

*The Pure in Heart (5:8)* Purity of heart means “single-minded.” Those who seek God with all their hearts are pure in heart. They shall not be disappointed. They shall see him.

*The Peacemakers (5:9)* It is not the peace-lovers, who become the children of God, but the peacemakers. To be children of God is to be involved in what God is doing and God is involved in peacemaking.

Unfortunately the English language lacks an adequate word for peace. Biblical peace is more than the absence of conflict. It has to do with harmony and wellbeing. This is



why so many people use the Hebrew word *Shalom* to talk about the Biblical concept of peace.

### ***Consequences of Following Jesus***

*The Persecuted (5:10-12)* Persecution is not a sign of God's disfavor, but a sign that his people are walking in the shoes of the prophets. They have reason to rejoice, even though they do not seek persecution.

The above beatitudes are not moral laws, but eschatological promises. At the same time that they are promises about God's coming Kingdom, they are also instructions on how to live the Christian life now. They are Jesus' blueprint for restoring the Image of God in us. These are not the details accepted by all Religions, but they are the details of Christians touched by Grace, responding in Faith, and submitting to spiritual growth.

Immediately following the Beatitudes, we find Jesus giving us the task of being the Salt of the Earth and a Light to the Nations. Christians, as the New Israel, are to fulfill this ancient covenant (Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6). Not to fulfill this task is to act foolishly against God and one's own interests. Salt and Light exist to be used, and when they are not used, they are worthless. We must now move on to the mission, which has been given to all, in whom God has begun to restore his Image.





## **8. FORMULATING THE MISSION**

### **The Call to Mission**

Thus far, I have described my concepts of Theology, Morality, and Salvation. Why not stop there? Isn't this sufficient? The reason is simple. "If you have knowledge, let others light their candles in it."<sup>95</sup> As Christians we know at least two things that make it necessary for us to formulate a mission. We know that God called us to be Holy, as He is Holy, and He called us to be a Light in the world, as He is a Light in the world. We find this commissioning in both the Hebrew and Christian Covenants. Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. (Leviticus 19:2)

---

<sup>95</sup> Both Winston Churchill and Margaret Fuller said this.

I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations.... I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6)

Be perfect [Holy], therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect [Holy]. (Matthew 5:48)

Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:14-16)

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12)

You are the light of the world. ... In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14 and 16)

The call to Holiness scares us more than the call to be a Light in the world, but we have not done very well with either one. If Holiness is our goal, then we need to find a way of shedding Light on what Holiness means. When pressed to define Holiness, John Wesley said, [Holiness] is “loving God with all our heart and serving Him with all our strength. Nor did I ever say or mean any more by perfection than thus loving and serving God.”<sup>96</sup> Wesley considered [Holiness] the greatest gift the people called Methodists possessed. Holiness

---

<sup>96</sup> In addition to Holiness, Wesley used two other terms: Christian Perfection, and Entire Sanctification. All three terms scare us because we think they are impossible to achieve.

is the goal of our mission, and if we begin to understand Holiness in a new way, maybe it won't scare us.<sup>97</sup>

Christianity is not an individualistic spiritual movement. It is better described as the formation of the Body of Christ or a Spiritual Temple. In 1 Corinthians 12:27, Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." A body is made up of many parts. The same is true of a Temple. In 2 Peter 2:4-6 and 9, we read:

Come to him, a living stone...and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." ... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

One person cannot make up the Body of Christ, nor can one living stone make up the Spiritual Temple. It was John Wesley who said, "The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion." In my opinion solitary religion is idolatry of the self. Faith in God is what matters. I prefer the Body of Christ to a Spiritual Temple. It's more dynamic.

### **The Great Commissions**

Faith ignites Mission. The Faith found in the Hebrew Covenant and the Faith found in the Christian Covenant make Mission necessary. I have already dealt with the goal of missions in both the Hebrew and Christian Covenants in

---

<sup>97</sup> See my definition of holiness on page 6.

terms of Holiness and Light. We are all called to be Holy, to be Light to the nations, and to become disciples of Jesus Christ. Being a disciple means that we are in a constant state of learning how to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. We will never graduate until our life on earth ends.

The Great Commission in the Christian Covenant can be found in all four Gospels and in the Book of Acts. They differ in content, but they send us on a mission to the ends of the earth, and God promises to go with us and to be with us in our mission.

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.” (Mark 16:15)

...and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:46-47)

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.” When he said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (John 20:21-22)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in

Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

### **Clarifying the Mission**

While many other passages could be included, these talk about making disciples, who will be a Light to the world. They will also be concerned about Personal and Social Holiness, for such is the goal of the mission. These make up the elements of the mission that are given to us. With this in mind, our next task is to clarify the mission based upon these elements. However we clarify the mission, we cannot overlook the call to be Holy, to be Light, and to become disciples of Jesus Christ.

We proceed first by defining the community of believers as the **Body of Christ**. Every part of the Body of Christ must analyze its own spiritual gifts, its own strengths and weaknesses before it can create or clarify its own mission. No part of the Body has all the spiritual gifts, without any weaknesses; and, every member of the Body has some spiritual gift or gifts. Every community of believers must become aware of its strengths and its weaknesses; and, be willing to improve its strengths and not worry about its weaknesses. Faith requires it.

I'd like to suggest first that there are six characteristics which the Body of Christ needs to be concerned with, and they are as follows:

#### ***1. Proclamation (Kerygma)***

The Good News is announced that God's Son, crucified and resurrected, has inaugurated a new kind of Kingdom.

*But we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:23-24)*

## **2. Celebration (Doxology)**

With joyous praise they rejoiced daily that Christ was in their midst and had made all things new.

*...so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 15:6)*

## **3. Teaching (Didache)**

Martyrs and missionaries were developed and trained in teaching with regularity and intensity.

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.... (Acts 2:42)*

## **4. Fellowship (Koinonia)**

A grateful people, recognizing their own unworthiness, were bound together in a close family relationship of mutual trust and transparency.

*They devoted themselves to...fellowship.... (Acts 2:42)*

## **5. Service (Diakonia)**

A concern for the poor and a reckless urge to share soon found expression and necessitated the organization of deacons.

*...they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. (Acts 2:45)*

## **6. Healing (Iasis)**

Sick minds and broken bodies were cured as the apostles were concerned with the whole person.

*A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured. (Acts 2:45)*

Next, let's look at a way of bringing these characteristics under a simple clarification of our mission. This is no easy



task and it is not the task of every member in the Body of Christ. It is the primary task of the inner core of the Body's leadership and the primary responsibility for it lies on the shoulders of the primary leader. If that leader does not articulate the mission based on Scripture and the spiritual gifts and strengths of the Body of Christ, there will be confusion.

There needs to be a simple statement or focus that is easy to understand and can be easily memorized. I happen to like the one articulated by John R. Mott, who said: The mission of the Church [Body of Christ] "is to make Jesus Christ known, trusted, loved, and obeyed, in the whole range of one's individual life and in all relationships."<sup>98</sup> I would shorten it to say: *The mission of the Body of Christ is to make Jesus Christ known, loved, and obeyed.* My reason for doing this is to make it easy to remember. The mission must be brief enough so that everyone can remember it without putting in any effort to memorize it.

The difficulty with most clarifications of the mission is that they fail to say anything concrete enough so that they can guide the spiritual gifts and strengths of the Body of Christ in its ministry. The mission must be clear and it must be concrete. It must help the Body of Christ focus on its main reason for being. If it does not do that, then the Body of Christ will develop into a mere social club when it ought to be focusing on its mission.

### **Clarifying the Details**

The responsibility for clarifying the mission falls on the shoulders of the primary leader and a few key leaders. It does not fall on the shoulders of all the members of the Body of Christ, nor does it fall on the shoulders of leaders who are

---

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in C. Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1979, p. 629.

Biblically illiterate. Those who clarify the mission must do so with a solid knowledge of Scripture, for the foundation of the mission is given in Scripture, and only those who know Scripture are equipped for the task. I don't mean to imply that the key leaders must be seminary graduates, but they should have at least studied a Survey of the Hebrew and Christian Covenants and must be involved in some kind of ongoing Bible Study. They might be studying on their own, but it would be preferable for them to be in a group study. We learn from one another.

The mission must make clear how the practical elements of discipleship tie in with the theological elements. The Body of Christ should not be polled for the formation of the theological elements, but the Body of Christ needs to be polled to discover the practical elements. To use the example I gave from John R. Mott, the first theological element is "to make Jesus Christ known." What practical elements are needed to do that? The most obvious would be that we need people to make Jesus known through teaching and example; therefore, we need to identify persons in the congregation with the gift of teaching and example. The best teachers are always examples. The gift of teaching alone is insufficient.

What is involved here is the discovery of the spiritual gifts, not just the talents, of the Body of Christ. We need to know the resources we have in the Body of Christ that can be applied to the theological mission. Without any resources, our mission is impotent. It will not inspire anyone to do anything. In analyzing the spiritual gifts of the Body of Christ, we want to discover not just their abilities but their passions. It's their passions that we want to connect to our theological mission. If we are going to poll the members of the Body of Christ, let's discover their passions.

It is important to write things down, but we don't need everyone to do that. In fact, the more people we involve in

the process, the more difficult it becomes and the result will be meaningless for our purpose. I would suggest that the primary leader, with a maximum of five to seven leaders, should go on a retreat to accomplish the task. I don't think anyone should be in this group who is not in an ongoing Bible Study. If that many people cannot be found, then the primary leader will have to take the number he or she can find. This is, of course, assuming that the primary leader is involved in an ongoing Bible Study. Clarifying the mission is a theological task that needs to be based on Scripture, the primary source of authority in every Body of Christ.

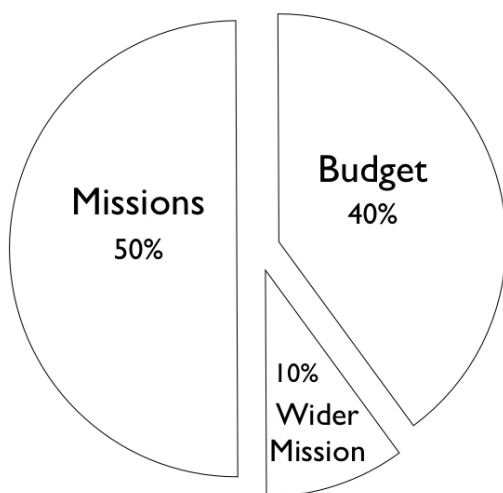
Following the six characteristics of the Body of Christ, I suggested a sample clarification of the mission. The final thing I would like to do is to illustrate how some of the details of fulfilling that mission might look.

To do this requires a knowledge of the spiritual gifts and passions of the disciples in the Body of Christ. Clarifying the mission is never finished. As new persons join the Body of Christ, their spiritual gifts and passions will have to be taken into account.

# OUR MISSION

*“Our Mission is to make Jesus Christ known, loved, and obeyed within our congregation, our community, and throughout the whole world.”*

<b>PRAISE</b> God through Corporate Worship			
<b>PREPARE</b> Ourselves for Ministry		<b>PROVIDE</b> Ministry for Others	
Through the...  Ministry of Discipleship Groups Ministry of Bible Study Ministry of Sunday School Ministry of Spiritual Gifts		Through a...  Ministry to Newcomers Ministry to Shut-ins Ministry to Inactives Ministry to One Another	
<b>PROCLAIM</b> Christ to the World...			
through Mission to Our Community	through Mission to Our State	through Mission to Our Nation	through Mission to Our World



## **9. SUPPORTING THE MISSION**

### **Tithing or Fundraising?**

If we are going to have a mission, that mission needs to be funded. Since God has given that mission to us through Jesus Christ, we don't have any choice. Taking on the support of this mission will increase our faith. The single question that confronts us in funding our mission is this: How will we do it? There are three possible answers to this question. We can fund our mission through tithing, free-will offerings, or by fundraising. We currently use a combination of all three methods; but, since I don't find any support for free-will offerings or fundraising in the Scriptures, I'm going to suggest tithing.

I find support for tithing in both the Hebrew and Christian Covenants. When the Priests and the Levites were given responsibility for the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle and its furnishings, the other eleven tribes were given the

responsibility to support them. This freed the Priests and Levites up to focus on their responsibilities, their mission.

While it's true that no one supported Jesus and his disciples on their mission, they all had vocations and were capable of supporting themselves. Even Paul was a tentmaker, capable of supporting himself. Priscilla and Aquila, companions of Paul, did the same thing. Paul took up offerings from the churches to help poorer Christians in Jerusalem, but he never involved himself in fundraising.

What's wrong with fundraising? First it detracts from carrying out the mission. Those who are involved in fundraising may think that they are supporting the mission, but the time consumed in fundraising can better be applied to the mission itself. Secondly, fundraising expects people not involved in the mission to help support the mission. The responsibility for supporting the mission lies squarely on the shoulders of those who believe in the mission. Outsiders don't need to help support what is not their mission.

But aren't some fundraisers carried on within the faith community, asking only for help from those who are part of and do support the mission? While that may be true, the time spent in fundraising could better be spent in carrying out the mission itself. The primary time and focus should be spent on the mission and not on dreaming up new ways to support it.

### **Tithes and Offerings**

Although Jesus promised to build his church<sup>99</sup> on the rock of Peter's faith, he didn't say how it might be supported.<sup>100</sup> The same holds for the Great Commission. Jesus says

---

<sup>99</sup> See Matthew 16:18. The Church is the Body of Christ, and it is built on Peter's Faith.

<sup>100</sup> See Matthew 16:18

nothing to his disciples about how it might be funded.<sup>101</sup> It might have been clear as to what they should do, but nothing is said about how the mission might be supported.

While the concept of tithing may have started with Abraham when he gave one tenth of his booty gained in battle to Melchizedek, King of Salem (Jerusalem),<sup>102</sup> it is not clear that this should become a method for supporting God's mission. Supporting the Levites and Priests who are responsible for taking care of the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle with all of its furnishings is not always placed in the context of giving ten percent to support their ministry, but it is clear that they are to be supported. To withhold that support is tantamount to robbing God.

The prophet Malachi warns the people that they are in distress because they have withheld their tithe to support the Levites, the Priests, the Temple, and charitable aid. In a sense they have robbed God and injured the mission. In Malachi 3:8 and 10, the prophet diagnoses the problem and offers a solution.

**The Diagnosis:** Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, "How are we robbing you?" In your tithes and offerings.

**The Solution:** Bring the full tithe (not a mere offering) into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

---

<sup>101</sup> See Matthew 28:18-20

<sup>102</sup> See Genesis 14:17-20: "And Abram gave him one tenth of everything."

While Jesus does not say much about tithing, he does mention it in conjunction with mercy, justice and faith. In Matthew 23:23, Jesus said to the Scribes and Pharisees: “For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others.”<sup>103</sup> Jesus acknowledges that the focus should be on the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. That was the purpose of the tithe. It is possible to tithe and neglect the mission just as much as it is possible to spend all of our time on fundraisers and neglect the mission.

---

<sup>103</sup> See also Luke 11:42. William Barclay in his commentary on Matthew 23:23 shares with us the precise meaning of “mint, dill, and cumin.” “The tithe was an essential part of Jewish religious regulations. ‘You shall tithe all the yield of your seed, which comes forth from the field year by year’ (Deuteronomy 14:22). ‘All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the trees is the Lord’s; it is holy to the Lord’ (Leviticus 27:30). This tithe was specially for the support of the Levites, whose task it was to do the material work of the Temple. The things which had to be tithed were further defined by the Law — ‘Everything which is eatable, and is preserved, and has its nourishment from the soil, is liable to be tithed.’ It is laid down: ‘Of dill one must tithe the seeds, the leaves and the stalks.’ So, then, it was laid down that every man must lay aside one-tenth of his produce for God. The point of Jesus’s saying is this. It was universally accepted that tithes of the main crops must be given. But mint and dill and cumin are herbs of the kitchen garden and would not be grown in any quantity; a man would have only a little patch of them. All three were used in cooking, and dill and cumin had medicinal uses. To tithe them was to tithe an infinitesimally small crop, maybe not much more than the produce of one plant. Only those who were superlatively meticulous would tithe the single plants of the kitchen garden.” William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew*, Volume 2, Chapters 11-28 (Revised Edition), (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 1975.



## How Much is a Tithe?

The simple answer is ten percent of one's income, but are we talking about gross income or net income? Is there an answer to this dilemma in Scripture. C. Peter Wagner suggests:

As I read the Scriptures, I have to conclude that a tithe, meaning 10 percent of one's income off the top, is the bare minimum for exercising the role of giving. I am not ordinarily legalistic in my views of Christian behavior, but I have to say that I believe that anyone who is under the 10 percent figure is engaging in a form of spiritual cheating. Some cheat the I.R.S. regularly and get away with it. No one cheats God and gets away with it. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).<sup>104</sup>

Wagner's answer is a bit harsh, but that's only because he realizes that Christians are good at rationalizing away the tithe.

C.S. Lewis takes us a step further. He agrees with Wagner that one cannot be legalistic about it, but one should give more than one can spare.

I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1979) p. 93.

<sup>105</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1952), pp. 81-82.

The point both men are making is that tithing is a basic minimum, and Christians ought to do more, not less, than the law demands.

I can only conclude that the question about whether to tithe on one's gross or net income is a moot point. We are to go beyond both. I agree fully with Harold Lindsell, who wrote:

If we could get all Christians to tithe, most of the financial problems of our churches would be solved. The Jews under law did better than Christians under grace. The Jews were meticulous about tithing. And if the Jews were that careful under law...isn't it strange that Christians under grace are so slothful?<sup>106</sup>

In the Body of Christ fundraising should be unnecessary. Going beyond tithing would free us up to support the mission.

John Wesley had a simple formula for supporting the mission and he was working among the poor. His formula was: "Get all you can; save all you can; give all you can." Dallas Willard agrees with Wesley's famous formula, but insists that it must be supplemented. It should read:

...get all you can; save all you can; freely use all you can within a properly disciplined spiritual life, and control all you can for the good of humankind and God's glory. Giving all you can would then naturally be a part of an overall wise stewardship.<sup>107</sup>

I have never known anyone who started tithing, who quit. Tithing increases your faith and makes you feel good. Even the author of Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus) in the *Apocrypha*

---

<sup>106</sup> Harold Lindsell, *Christianity Today*, February 15, 1985, p. 30.

<sup>107</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), p. 217.

understands the guiding principle behind supporting the mission. In Sirach 35:10-13, we read:

Be generous when you worship the Lord, and do not stint the first fruits of your hands. With every gift show a cheerful face, and dedicate your tithe with gladness. Give to the Most High as he has given to you, and as generously as you can afford. For the Lord is the one who repays, and he will repay you sevenfold.

The Apostle Paul said essentially the same thing in 2 Corinthians 9:7: “Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” I would suggest that we all learn not to give until it hurts, but to give until it feels good. Such giving will always take us beyond the tithe.

### **Should the Whole Tithe go to the Church?**

The whole tithe was never intended only for the Levites



and the Priests. When Jesus mentioned the weightier matters of the law such as justice, mercy and faith, he was talking about the mission, which has to do with justice, mercy and faith. The tithe is not only to be used to support the buildings and staff.

How should the tithe be apportioned? I would propose that the first fifty percent of the tithe be used to support the weightier matters of justice, mercy and faith, and that the second fifty percent be used to support the staff, the buildings, and the wider missions.<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> Sometimes called “Denominational Apportionments” of the Church.

I would not burden the staff and the treasurer with processing the first fifty percent. This could be done through a mission fair in which representatives from the various ministries and missions, dealing with justice, mercy, and faith, would be present to interpret their ministries and missions. Disciples<sup>109</sup> could gather the information and pay this part of their tithes directly to the ministry or mission they want to support.

What about denominational apportionments? I recognize the need here, and that is why I suggest denominational apportionments come out of the second fifty percent, but that they need to be represented at the mission fair for the sake of interpretation.

Can the Body of Christ, which needs to support a staff, buildings, and denominational apportionments, survive on only fifty percent of the tithe? In most Protestant Denominations, they are surviving on less than 50% of a tithe, and so I would see this formula granting more money, not less, to staff, buildings and denominational apportionments.

### **Endowments, Memorial Gifts, and Saving Accounts**

The Body of Christ is not a bank. The faithful contribute to support the mission, not to save money. Endowments undercut the stewardship of giving. If people know that there is a large endowment, why should they give?

Memorial gifts are another matter, but the money given as memorials should be used, not stashed away in a memorial account. Memorials are excellent resources for purchasing things that have not been included in the budget. Of course people should be asked how they want memorial funds to be used, but there should be a list of things that the congregation

---

<sup>109</sup> I prefer to call members of the Body of Christ “disciples.”

needs, which have not or cannot be placed in the budget. People, however, should not be allowed to give to items or causes not approved, or not on the list. Undesignated funds should be available on short notice, and should be at the discretion of the staff, not a committee. The staff is most in touch with the daily needs of the mission and its program. Requests from the Staff should go to the Administrative Board or Council. If the request is approved, the committee fulfills the request. No committee has the right to reject what the Board or Council has approved. All committees are accountable to the Board or Council and must carry out its decisions.

Is there a place for a savings account? Certainly. There are some things that can't be purchased without saving up for them, but such savings accounts must be for an approved and specific purpose. The building itself might come under that category. Buildings, like everything else, have a useful life span. A savings account for a new building should be established as soon as the mortgage has been paid. Most buildings probably only have a useful life of about fifty years. When the time comes to replace the building, there needs to be some money saved for the task. A financial drive could be done at that time, but upon paying the mortgage, it would also make sense to begin saving for the next building.

What about a new roof, furnace, air-conditioning, a remodeling job, etc.? Do we need a savings account for every possibility? As long as our support of the mission is so meager that we have to rely on fundraisers, we won't have anything to save. If, on the other hand, we begin to support the mission in a methodical manner, there will be money to save. Savings accounts should not be started for just anything. They should be specific, and everyone needs to understand their purpose. We give to support the mission, and the first priority always goes to the mission.

## A Final Word on Buildings and Staff

Buildings should be shaped around the mission. Form should always follow function. John Wesley had some good advice for those planning new buildings.

Let all preaching-houses be built plain and decent; but not more expensive than is absolutely unavoidable: Otherwise the necessity of raising money will make rich men necessary to us. But if so, we must be dependent upon them, yea, and governed by them. And then farewell to the Methodist discipline, if not doctrine too.<sup>110</sup>

There is a need for buildings, but buildings are not our first priority. The same could be said of staff. We need both, but they are not our first priority. Staff and buildings exist to help us fulfill our mission.

Tithing, not fundraising, is the way to support our mission. Tithing is a choice we must make. It may be painful at first, but beyond the pain is the joy of giving. This was beautifully illustrated by Walbert Buhmann when he described how the Pentecostals in Latin America appealed to their members to tithe:

Give until it hurts. Then go on giving until it stops hurting. Salvation is free but not cheap. There are many who put nothing in the collection and then are surprised at the coldness of the worship.<sup>111</sup>

Tithing enables us to put more time and effort in the mission. Fundraising puts the emphasis in the wrong place. Let me

---

<sup>110</sup> *The Large Minutes*, VIII:332. Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. also deals with this topic in his book, *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), p. 65.

<sup>111</sup> Walbert Buhmann, *The Coming of the Third Church*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1977), p. 378.

close this chapter by saying that I am not against all fundraising. There may be a place for fundraising, but only when it gives first priority to the mission itself and does not expect nonChristians to support the Christian mission. Free-will offerings also have a place, but only when they are given beyond the tithe. The tithe is the basic method for supporting the mission.







## **10. ORGANIZING FOR MISSION**

### **Committees or Discipleship Groups?**

Once financial support for Mission is in place, we can focus on the mission itself. Mission doesn't just happen; it must be organized. What we don't want to do is to over organize. There are at least three models we can use. They are committees, small groups, or a combination of committees and small groups. While some committees are needed, the major focus should be on small groups.

Since making disciples is our primary Mission, the major focus should be on forming Discipleship Groups. I don't mean to rule out other kinds of small groups. Fellowship groups can play an important role, but discipleship is the primary mission. If one can only find time for one small group, the choice should be a Discipleship Group. This is where the members of the Body of Christ interact.

Some administrative committees may be necessary, such as Staff Parish, Trustees and Finance. They cannot be replaced by Discipleship Groups. While the above administrative committees may still be needed, every member of an administrative committee should also be a member of a Discipleship Group. Committees on Evangelism, Missions, and Social Concerns would no longer be needed. They are not administrative committees, and they would no longer be necessary. All of these functions can be accomplished through the Discipleship Groups. Let us take a closer look at why such a radical change is necessary.

**Administrative and/or Transformational**

Committees are administrative in nature and Discipleship Groups are transformational. What does this mean? Perhaps it can best be defined by illustrating the differences that exist between committees and Discipleship Groups.

<b>Administrative Committees</b>	<b>Discipleship Groups</b>
Committees... usually have one leader.	Discipleship Groups... share leadership.
Committees... are task oriented.	Discipleship Groups... focus on sharing.
Committees... focus on internal matters.	Discipleship Groups... focus on the Mission
Committees... focus on solving problems.	Discipleship Groups... support one another.

There is a radical difference between the committee and the discipleship group, even though they are often the same size. Committees are task oriented, while discipleship groups focus on nurture, transformation, and mission. Committee members sometimes argue over alternative methods to deal with the task at hand, while members of discipleship groups

never argue. Their primary purpose for meeting is to support one another in their respective ministries. They take no minutes and everything that is said in a discipleship group is confidential. There is never a need to agree, but there is always a need to support one another. Dinah Maria Mulock Craik (1826-1887) described in a poem the relationship that should exist between disciples:

Oh, the comfort—the inexpressible comfort  
Of feeling safe with a person,  
Having neither to weigh thoughts,  
Nor measure words—but pouring them  
All right out—just as they are—  
Chaff and grain together—  
Certain that a faithful hand will  
Take and sift them—  
And with the breath of kindness  
Blow the rest away.<sup>112</sup>

There is, of course, another approach to organizing for mission, which encompasses both the administrative and transformational emphases. The ideal approach, however, does not seek a balance between the administrative and the transformational; rather it views the administrative as supporting the transformational. That's why I have suggested that more discipleship groups are needed than committees. In fact, I would suggest that everyone belong to a Discipleship Group and that committees be kept to a minimum. Everyone doing committee work should also belong to a Discipleship Group.

### **Organizing around Discipleship Groups**

If a church has organized itself around committees, it may be difficult to comprehend how it might organize itself

---

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 49.

around discipleship groups. How does anything get done if discipleship groups don't have any task to accomplish? Let's take a look at how a congregation might organize itself for its mission through Discipleship Groups.

***The Size.*** Jesus called twelve disciples and taught them the essentials of discipleship and sent them out to practice their discipleship and lead others. I could suggest that he also worked with an inner circle of three, Peter, James, and John. I would also suggest that the ideal size for a discipleship group is somewhere between five and seven. The minimum size would be three and the maximum size would be twelve. When a group reaches twelve, a new group needs to be formed. I would not break up a group that has bonded. I would start a new group that could take on new members. It is best for groups to aim at the ideal size, avoiding both the minimum and maximum.

***Meetings.*** Discipleship Groups and committees have one thing in common—meetings. While committees usually meet monthly to take care of their business, Discipleship Groups should meet every week, excluding Holidays. If the members of a group cannot meet every week, they might try every other week. Meeting once a month is insufficient. There is an element of caring for one another in the regular meetings and that can't wait for a month to pass. Because of the time that passes between meetings, committees frequently work until their business is finished and that may take much longer than an hour. Discipleship Groups meet for one hour a week. It is important to stay within that hour. If a group continually meets for more than an hour, it threatens the longevity of the group. For the same reason, the focus should not be on refreshments. On an occasion the group might have a special meeting over refreshments, a pot luck, or dinner, but this should not become the norm.

**Agenda.** The agenda in a Discipleship Group begins with a devotion, led by the leader. Following the devotion and prayer, beginning with the leader, everyone gives an account of how the past week has gone. Reference is usually made to the covenant that the group has created. After everyone has given an account of their week, the group begins a discussion on a Bible passage, a chapter or two from a book on discipleship or some related topic. The purpose here is to help the members of the Discipleship Group focus their discipleship on the next week and beyond. At the end of the hour, the leader closes in prayer.

**Leadership.** While a committee generally has one leader, who convenes the group, creates an agenda, and leads the meeting, the discipleship group has as many leaders as it has members. Leadership is shared by means of rotation. Everyone in the group takes their turn at leadership. If there are multiple groups, each group might select one person to meet on a monthly basis with representatives from the other groups. The purpose here is not only to grow in discipleship, but also to grow in leadership capability.

**Specialized Discipleship Groups.** In most Discipleship Groups, the members help one another to identify their spiritual gifts and support one another in putting those spiritual gifts to work. There is no expectation that everyone has the same spiritual gift and that they will all work on some project of ministry or mission together. In a specialized discipleship group, members of the group all have the same spiritual gift or passion for the same ministry or mission. They do work together on a ministry or mission project, and any material they study will help them to improve their effectiveness. Examples of specialized Discipleship Groups include Caring Ministries, Evangelism, Missions, Social Action, Christian Education, etc. A specialized Discipleship Group might, for example, be made up of Sunday School Teachers, who support one another in Christian Education.

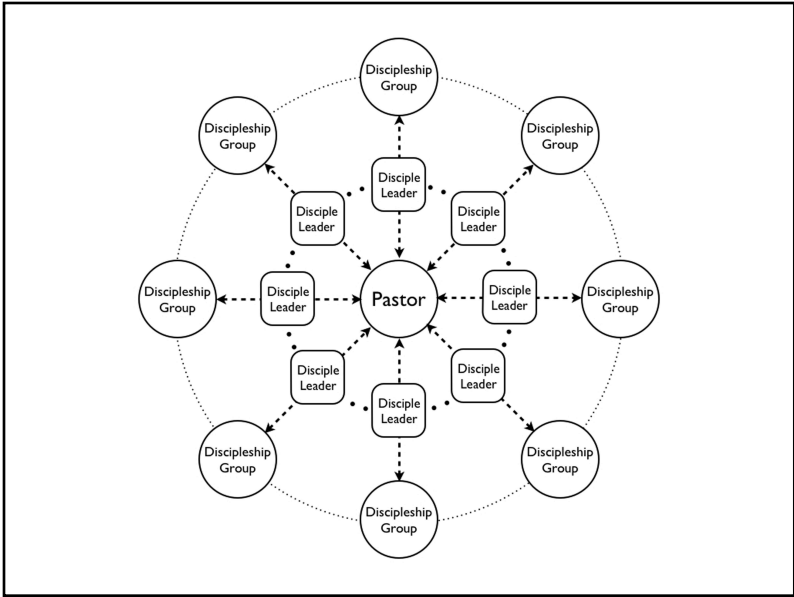
Another specialized group might be made up of persons who regularly participate in Habitat for Humanity or work together in a soup kitchen. The special interests are endless. People could join such groups based on their perceived spiritual gifts and passion for various ministries.

### **Coordinating the Discipleship Groups**

As the number of Discipleship Groups increase, coordination becomes necessary. Each Discipleship Group should have one person who represents the group. These representatives would then meet monthly with other discipleship leaders and the pastor to share feedback. This is not just to inform the pastor, but to give program ideas to the pastor. The pastor does not have to organize every idea, but the pastor does need to support the ideas presented. Those who present the ideas should be the ones to carry them out. If it's your vision, it's your mission.

One of the more immediate responsibilities of the representatives of the various Discipleship Groups is to organize a quarterly meeting of everyone involved in a Discipleship Group. The purpose of the quarterly meetings is to help everyone know what's going on. Outside resource persons could be invited in to inform the Discipleship Groups of the spiritual and material needs of the community. While these quarterly meetings will be primarily attended by members of the Discipleship Groups, they should also be open to the general public. This will be one way of introducing Discipleship Groups to those who have not yet joined one. Committees limit the number of people who can get involved. Discipleship Groups expand as people choose to participate. There is no limit to the number of Discipleship Groups the Body of Christ might have. They are like cells. They multiply, but they do need coordination.

The following graphic might help to visualize how the Body of Christ might be organized for mission.



## **Inviting New Disciples**

Jesus invited people to become his disciples. The first invitation can be found in Mark 8:34, where Jesus said, “If any want to become my followers (disciples), let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” What is their cross? What is our cross? For Jesus it was his mission of proclaiming the Good News, his ministry of teaching and his ministry of healing. The consequence of doing these things was his suffering and death on the cross. Jesus mission and ministry, however, was not a drudgery just because he could see the consequence of the cross. Hebrews 12:1-2 puts everything in perspective, when the author challenges us by saying, “...let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Our cross is our ministry or mission. We don't want the suffering of the cross any more than Jesus did. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed, "My Father, if this (the cross) cannot pass unless I drink of it, your will be done." (Matthew 26:42) No one should seek suffering and death, but everyone should be aware of the consequences of taking on a ministry or mission. It is vitally important that we take on a ministry or mission for which we are gifted. Jesus had many gifts. We may only have one, but everyone has at least one spiritual gift. This does not mean that you will not find someone more gifted than you, but God has given you a special gift and he expects you to use it. Let's take a look at some of the spiritual gifts, first from the New Testament:<sup>113</sup>

<b>New Testament Spiritual Gifts</b>	
1. Wisdom	10. Apostles
2. Knowledge	11. Prophets
3. Faith	12. Evangelists
4. Healing	13. Pastors
5. Miracles	14. Teachers
6. Prophecy	15. Helper (Deacon)
7. Discernment	16. Leader (Bishop)
8. Tongues	17. Administration
9. Interpretation	18. Committee Work

---

<sup>113</sup> The spiritual gifts in this chart come mainly from 1 Corinthians 12:7-10 and 28 and from Ephesians 4:11-12. These are gifts for the "common good" and to "build up the Body of Christ."



Peter Wagner listed twenty-seven Spiritual Gifts in his book, *Discover Your Spiritual Gifts*. His list is as follows:<sup>114</sup>

<b>C. Peter Wagner's List of Spiritual Gifts</b>		
1. Prophecy	10. Faith	19. Evangelist
2. Service	11. Healing	20. Pastor
3. Teaching	12. Miracles	21. Celibacy
4. Exhortation	13. Discernment	22. Poverty
5. Giving	14. Tongues	23. Martyrdom
6. Leadership	15. Interpretation	24. Hospitality
7. Mercy	16. Apostle	25. Missionary
8. Wisdom	17. Helps	26. Intercession
9. Knowledge	18. Administration	27. Exorcism

If none of the spiritual gifts helps you make a decision about yourself, then consider what Frederick Buechner said: “The place where God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Another approach is to ask the members of your Discipleship Group to help you discover your gift. Your faith will be strengthened as you discover your gift and put it into practice.

### **The Guiding Principle**

The big question is how does one put one’s faith into practice? The mission doesn’t really help, for it is primarily a

---

<sup>114</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1979), p. 9.

goal. I have chosen as my mission statement: “To make Jesus known, loved, and obeyed.” How does one proceed? The best answer I have ever come across was given by John Wesley in his three General Rules: (1) Do no harm, (2) Do all the good you can, and (3) Attend all the ordinances of God. The difficulty with these three rules is that they gave details for Wesley’s time, many of which are not very relevant to our own time. Fortunately David Lowes Watson has updated Wesley’s General Rules into a Guiding Principle, which he calls “The General Rule of Discipleship.”<sup>115</sup>

**To witness to Jesus Christ in the world,  
and to follow his teachings through  
acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion,  
under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.**

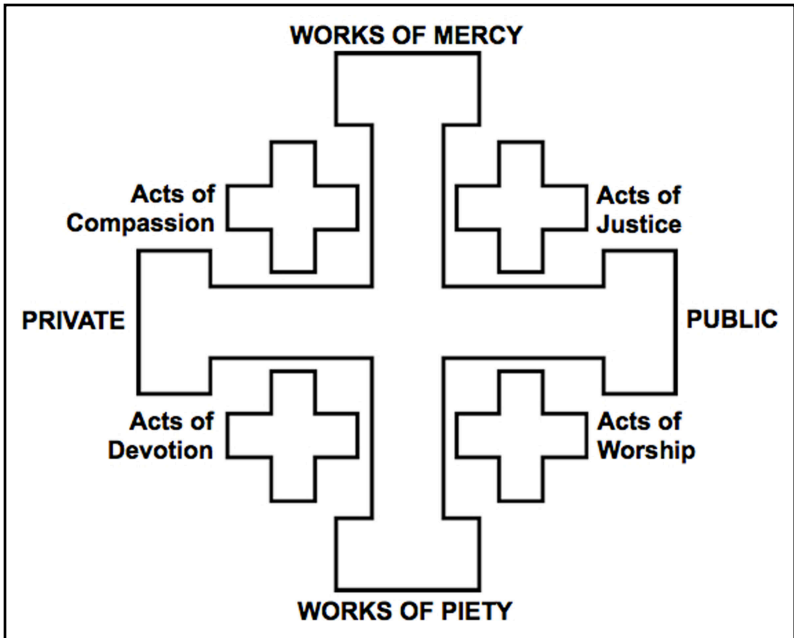
Watson has also created a diagram using the Jerusalem cross to illustrate this new guiding principle for Christian Disciples.

What’s important about this diagram is where everything is placed. On the top of the cross we find the **two works of mercy**, (1) acts of compassion and (2) acts of justice. These works of mercy take priority over the **two works of piety**, which are (1) acts of devotion and (2) acts of worship. As we discover in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, works of mercy always take priority over works of piety.

Next we have the more private acts of compassion and acts of devotion located on the lefthand side. The more public acts of justice and worship are placed on the righthand side. The purpose is to illustrate priority, but also to maintain balance.

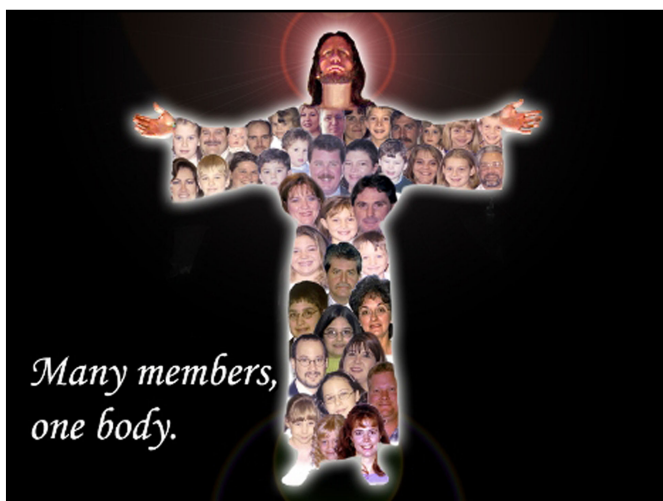
---

<sup>115</sup> David Lowes Watson, *Covenant Discipleship* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1991), p. 78.



The general rule of discipleship is a guiding principle for small groups. It represents the cross every disciple is expected to bear. It helps to define the very meaning of discipleship, and that is precisely why discipleship groups should sponsor all new disciples who are to be incorporated into the Body of Christ, the Church. To better understand why this is so, I must now turn to a definition of the Church, which I prefer to call the Body of Christ.





## **11. THE BODY OF CHRIST**

### **The Birthday of the Church**

Why have I taken so long to define the Church? While I have made references to the Church, I have not taken the time to define what it is, or where it is and what it's doing. My reason is simple. The Church takes on its identity from its birth and its mission. Since I've dealt with its mission, I would now like to deal with its birth, its identity, and its location.

Pentecost is usually defined as the birthday of the Church, but I'd like to suggest that the Church was born much earlier than the Day of Pentecost. Jürgen Moltmann, in struggling with the origin of the Church, said:

...one is led from Pentecost and the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh to Easter and the vocation of the Apostles. But Easter points unmistakably to Good Friday since it was as the crucified one that Christ

appeared to the disciples in the brilliance of the glory to come.<sup>116</sup>

I agree with Moltmann. The origin of the Church took place much earlier than the Day of Pentecost. I would trace its origins back to Jesus' invitation to the twelve to take up their cross and follow him. From the suffering Messiah, the Messianic people were born, namely, "the people of the Beatitudes." These are the people who long for the Kingdom of God, and suffer for its coming.

Maybe those first disciples did not call themselves the Church, but in Jesus' Last Supper, he gave them bread and wine, symbols of his body and blood. As the Body of Christ, they were to continue his work in the world. The Church is the Body of Christ and we are members of that Body.

### **Where is the Body of Christ?**

#### *1. Among Believers (The Manifest or Visible Church)*

Jesus was quite clear about where we could find him. He is present in three places, among believers, among the poor and the oppressed, and in the New Jerusalem. Let's look first at his presence among believers. In Matthew 18:20 (NRSV), Jesus said, "...where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." Jesus doesn't say what they believe, only that they have gathered in his name.

One thing becomes clear as the early Church grew. Ethnic, class, and gender distinctions were overcome. Paul made this crystal clear in two of his letters:

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for

---

<sup>116</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "The Ecumenical Church under the Cross," *Theology Digest* (Winter, 1976), pp. 382-383.

all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28, NRSV)

In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all! (Colossians 3:11, NRSV)

All were welcome, but they were expected to believe. Romans 10:9 was one of their first baptismal formulas. It was simple, but behind it was the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah (Christ).

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9, NRSV)

## *2. Among the Poor and Oppressed (The Latent or Invisible Church)*

Although we should have known it from reading the four Gospels, we are surprised to find Jesus hanging out with the poor and the oppressed. If the Church, which is the Body of Christ, is located where Jesus is, then we should not be surprised to find him among the poor and the oppressed. The surprise is illustrated in Jesus' parable of the Last Judgment, where there is a separation of all people as a shepherd separates his sheep from his goats. Everyone is surprised. The goats are surprised that they are placed with the goats and the sheep are surprised that they are placed with the sheep.

When those accepted as sheep express their surprise, they are told in Matthew 25:35-36,

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

When those rejected as goats express their surprise, they are told in Matthew 25:42-43,

I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.

The goats are not only surprised, but they don't understand; and, so they ask, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" (Matthew 25:44, NRSV) The answer thunders in their ears, as they are told, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." (Matthew 25:45, NRSV)

Matthew 25:31-46 is not just about social ethics. It is also a description of where we can find Jesus. He can be found among the poor and the oppressed. But, we might ask, is this a Church? If we define the Church as being where Jesus is present, then we must admit that it is at least a latent Church. We also know that Jesus taught that it is more difficult for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.<sup>117</sup> Jesus also taught that the Kingdom of God belongs to the poor (in spirit).<sup>118</sup>

### *3. in the New Jerusalem (The Church Triumphant)*

Finally, Jesus is present in the New Jerusalem, where every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.<sup>119</sup> While none of us really knows what the New Jerusalem will be like, the

---

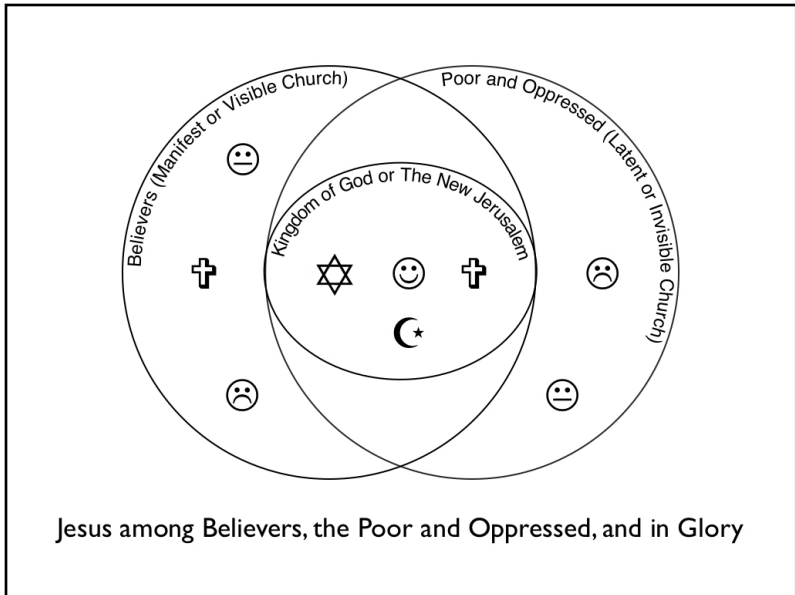
<sup>117</sup> See Matthew 19:24, Mark 10:25, and Luke 18:25.

<sup>118</sup> See Matthew 5:3 and Luke 16:20.

<sup>119</sup> See Isaiah 45:23; 54:17; Romans 14:11; and Philippians 2:11.



closing chapters of the Book of Revelation tell us what will be present and what will be absent. Most of all it tells us that God is making all things new.<sup>120</sup> Since believers and the poor and oppressed will be there, they will make up the Church Triumphant. I'll have more to say about the New Jerusalem in the next chapter.



Above is a diagram illustrating how the three Churches exist at present. Ideally, all three Churches would come together, but that will have to wait until the end of time. The crosses represent baptized Christians. The smiley faces represent unbaptized persons. Not all baptized persons will end up in the New Jerusalem, nor will all unbaptized persons remain outside of the New Jerusalem. The goal of the Body of Christ, the Church, is to invite everyone into the New Jerusalem.

<sup>120</sup> Revelation 21:5.

## **Some Practical Matters**

### *Baptism*

I'm moving away from infant baptism. It's not that infant baptism is wrong. It's just not practical. The parents are making a decision that may or may not be confirmed by the infant or child. There are reasons for baptizing infants and children in Scripture, but the reasons have to do with Jewish proselyte and household baptisms. Faith is a choice, and the individual should make the choice for him or herself.

### *Membership*

Confirmation should be eliminated. It has become, for the most part, a meaningless activity. I have consistently asked young people why they were in confirmation, and almost 100% of them say, "Because my parents forced me." What should be stressed is conversion and religious experience, and children should be welcomed as they feel led by God to join the Body of Christ. It must be their own decision from the start.

Everyone uniting with the Body of Christ should first join a Discipleship Group. Discipleship Groups should sponsor and present persons for discipleship (not membership) in the Body of Christ (the Church). This should be a requirement for all ages. Exceptions could be made for persons unable to participate because of health, age, etc. Minimum requirements for new disciples would be as follows:

1. Join a Discipleship Group
2. Attend Worship Regularly
3. Give Proportionately
4. Participate in a Ministry or Mission

### *Weddings*

Christian weddings should take place on Sunday morning in the same way as baptisms. The liturgies are about the same

size. Receptions could take place after worship or at some other appropriate time.

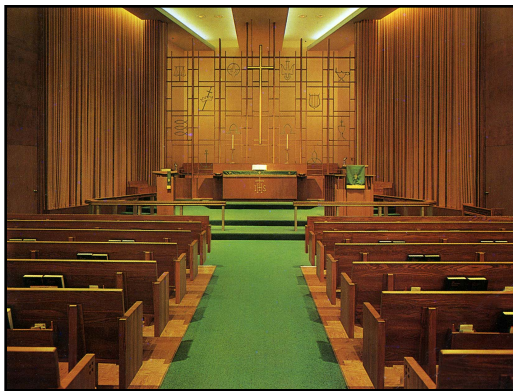
### *Funerals*

I like funerals in the Sanctuary of the Church building. If having the funeral in the Sanctuary would make it difficult for the remaining spouse to return to worship, then I would recommend having the funeral in the funeral home.

### Buildings

John Wesley's advice on simple, but functional, buildings makes sense to me. The congregation doesn't exist to maintain the building.<sup>121</sup> The mission should determine what is needed in a building. If part of the mission is a ministry to the homeless, then showers would be needed, as would a good kitchen and a place for sleeping.

The Sanctuary is the living and dining room for the congregation. The pews or chairs should not all face forward like the seats in a bus. People should be able to see one another and see over the heads of those sitting in front of them. All of the furnishings in the Sanctuary should be moveable, making the Sanctuary multifunctional.



Good Shepherd United Methodist Church

---

<sup>121</sup> See note 101 in chapter 9.



Covenant United Methodist Church

### **The Fellowship of Holy Communion**

The disciples of Jesus Christ, make up the Body of Christ. This is where the real presence of Christ resides. It is not in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. The elements of Holy Communion are signs that point to the Body of Christ, which is made up of Jesus' disciples.

The earliest account of Holy Communion is found in 1 Corinthians 11. Before Paul invites the disciples in Corinth to participate, he names several abuses and commands them to examine themselves before they participate. Only after they have done that, does he invite them to take Holy Communion.

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is [broken]for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of

me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.<sup>122</sup>



Communion Table in Cappadocia, Turkey

The invitation to participate in Holy Communion is very important, and should be taken seriously. Our traditional invitation is as follows:

Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways: Draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort, and make your humble confession to almighty God.<sup>123</sup>

John Wesley called Holy Communion a *converting ordinance*, meaning that one could experience a religious conversion at the communion table. For this reason the

---

<sup>122</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (NRSV).

<sup>123</sup> *The United Methodist Hymn Book* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), p. 26.

invitation is an open one, but it does call for repentance and a renewed commitment to the commandments of God and a decision to walk in his holy ways.

I believe every disciple of Jesus Christ has the right to take Holy Communion and share Holy Communion with other disciples. There is nothing magic in the Sacrament. It is a sign pointing to the Body of Christ and every disciple is part of that Body. When we take Holy Communion, we do two things: (1) we remember Jesus' death on the cross, and (2) we proclaim that he will come again to establish the New Jerusalem.



## **12. LIVING IN THE NEW JERUSALEM**

Thus far I have said almost nothing about eternal life. When I talked about salvation, it had primarily to do with restoring the image of God. Having that image restored in us is a necessary prerequisite for living in the Kingdom of God, particularly in eternity. I believe in eternal life, but we have to prepare for it. To this end John Wesley said, “We have nothing to do but save souls.”<sup>124</sup> Wesley also insisted, “I have no religion but a social religion.”<sup>125</sup> We need to prepare for eternal life because there are other people there and we need to learn how to live with them for eternity.

### **Eternal Life in the Hebrew Covenant**

Very little is said about eternal life in the Hebrew Covenant. The first indication that there is such a thing as

---

<sup>124</sup> Quoted in Emerson Colaw, *Beliefs of a Methodist Christian*, p. 108.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

eternal life is the translation of Enoch in Genesis 5:24. The text simply says, “Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him.” The implication is that Enoch didn’t experience death. What’s interesting in this story is that Enoch’s father was Cain.

The only other person who didn’t have to experience death was Elijah. The story is told in 2 Kings 2:9-11. Elijah and Elisha are talking, and Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.” Elisha replied, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.” As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven.” Just exactly what is meant by heaven at this time is not clear, but like Enoch, Elijah didn’t have to experience death. Elisha did receive a double portion of Elijah’s spirit.

I must admit that this would be my personal preference. I don’t look forward to the experience of death. I once passed out in the emergency room while they were looking after my wife, who had broken her jaw. When I woke up, they were removing my clothes and about to perform CPR on me. I don’t even remember passing out. If the experience of death would be like that, death would be sweet. It would be like falling asleep and waking up in the Kingdom of God. But the experience of death is not always like what I experienced in the emergency room of the hospital.

The most vivid affirmations of eternal life can be found in the martyr stories of 2 Maccabees. The first story is that of a ninety year old man named Eleazar, who refused to eat swine. Death was the punishment for his disobedience. In response, Eleazar said, “Even if for the present I would avoid the punishment of mortals, yet whether I live or die I will not



escape the hands of the Almighty.”<sup>126</sup> While this is not a clear affirmation of eternal life, it is a clear statement of belief in life after death.

Following the story of Eleazar is a mother who is forced to watch her seven sons die gruesome deaths. Refusing to eat swine, they preferred to die rather than to transgress the Law. When the king had their tongues cut out, scalped them, cut off their hands and feet, and fried them in a pan, the second son spoke out for all of them. He cried out, “...the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws.”<sup>127</sup>

### **Eternal Life in the Christian Covenant**

By the time of Jesus, the Pharisees were teaching not only the hope of eternal life, but the Resurrection of the Body. Like Eleazar and the mother’s seven sons, Jesus had to face death, but like the Pharisees, he affirmed the Resurrection of the Body. He taught this to his disciples on several occasions. An early example of this can be found in Mark 8:31:

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days he will rise again.

Jesus was talking about himself. Peter understood him all too well; and so, he took Jesus aside to correct his teaching. Jesus rebuked Peter and said,

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to

---

<sup>126</sup> 2 Maccabees 6:26.

<sup>127</sup> 2 Maccabees 7:9.

gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.<sup>128</sup>

Jesus affirms that he is not the only one who will be raised from the dead. Everyone will be raised. There is also an implication of judgment in Jesus' teaching. This becomes crystal clear in the three parables of Matthew 25.<sup>129</sup> The third parable, the Judgment of Nations, makes it very clear. A time will come when there will be a general resurrection and a final judgment.

It's difficult to reject the existence of Heaven and Hell if one reads all the teachings of Jesus. One can reject the existence of Heaven and Hell by reading the Hebrew Covenant, but in the Christian Covenant both Heaven and Hell are described in vivid terms. Perhaps Heaven and Hell can best be understood in the following statement:

Heaven is life with God,  
Hell is life without God.  
Heaven and Hell are not rewards.  
They are the consequences of the choices we make.<sup>130</sup>

In the Christian Covenant, Heaven is generally referred to as the Kingdom of God.<sup>131</sup> One thing is clear in all these descriptions. Evil will not exist in the Kingdom of God and

---

<sup>128</sup> Mark 8:34-38.

<sup>129</sup> The Ten Bridesmaids, the Talents, and the Judgment of Nations.

<sup>130</sup> Brian D. McClaren, *Finding Faith (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1999)*, p. 116.-117.

<sup>131</sup> In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus calls it the Kingdom of Heaven.

so we must prepare ourselves for the new Eden, which Jesus calls the Kingdom of God, and John calls the New Jerusalem.

Before dealing with the New Jerusalem, I'd like to first look at the resurrection of Jesus. Even though the Pharisees taught about the Resurrection of the Body, no one expected the resurrection of Jesus. When Jesus was crucified, everyone believed he was dead, including his closest followers. The only ones who seemed to wonder about his rising from the dead were his enemies, and they didn't really believe he would. The chief priests and the Pharisees demanded that Pilate secure the tomb until after the third day, fearing that his disciples would steal the body and tell everyone that he rose from the dead. Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." So they made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.<sup>132</sup>

When Jesus did rise from the dead, it was a surprise to everyone. The various accounts differ, but the message was still the same. The angel said it all: "He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said Come, see the place where he lay."<sup>133</sup> The empty tomb left Jesus' disciples puzzled. They didn't know what to make of it until Jesus appeared to them, and even then, it took several appearances before they realized what



---

<sup>132</sup> Matthew 27:62-66.

<sup>133</sup> Matthew 28:6.

had happened. Once they realized that it was really him, they told everyone who would listen that he was alive. This became their primary message. At first the Apostle Paul, who had been a Pharisee, didn't believe it, but after his experience on the Road to Damascus he became a believer. When he wrote to the Christians in Corinth he said,

I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, [Peter] then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me.<sup>134</sup>

### **Resurrection of the Body or Immortality of the Soul?**

I accept the witness of those who were there. With the exception of John, all of them died as martyrs. I find it difficult to believe that they could do that on a lie. There is one difficulty, which cannot be ignored. Paul faced this difficulty head on with the Greek Christians in Athens and Corinth. Resurrection of the Body simply didn't make sense to the Greeks. They believed in the Immortality of the Soul, and it is difficult to reconcile the Resurrection of the Body with the Immortality of the Soul.

The Immortality of the Soul is a Greek understanding of eternal life. The idea is that at death the soul separates from the body and lives forever. The body is corruptible, but the soul is eternal. Many Greeks viewed the body as evil and the soul as good. The body was like a prison in which the soul

---

<sup>134</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.

was confined. In death, the soul was released or liberated from the body. This was not what the Pharisees or Jesus taught, but it is what many Christians believed then and many believe today. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul tried to reconcile these two very different understandings of the nature of life after death.

The first thing Paul does is to insist on one fact: Jesus Christ really rose from the dead and he did not lose his body in the process. How could that be? Paul begins his argument by saying, “Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.”<sup>135</sup> After stating the different kinds of flesh in this world, Paul continues, “There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another.”<sup>136</sup> While the earthly body is different from the heavenly body, the heavenly body has a relationship to the earthly body. “It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.” The physical body is like a seed, which grows into or is transformed into the spiritual body. As the seed no longer exists, the physical body no longer exists. Paul considers this whole process a mystery:

Listen, I will tell you mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.<sup>137</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:39.

<sup>136</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:40.

<sup>137</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.

While Paul’s explanation may have its weaknesses, no one else has come up with anything better. Jesus’ physical body was absent from the tomb. His physical body had been transformed into a heavenly body, with which he could eat fish and move about. No one knows what it will be like to live in a heavenly body, but Paul insists that it is not unrelated to the earthly body. The body is not to be viewed as evil or some kind of prison from which we need to escape. What God created is good, and “...as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.”<sup>138</sup> The essence of salvation is the restoration of the image of God, which prepares us for translation of the earthly body into the heavenly body.

The above attempt to reconcile the Resurrection of the Body with the Immortality of the Soul is not easy to understand. We must agree with Paul that it is indeed a mystery. Christians grappled with this mystery for more than three hundred years and are still grappling with it. The two most important creeds end with similar but different statements.

I believe in...the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.<sup>139</sup>

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.<sup>140</sup>

### **The New Jerusalem**

I started with creation. The primary symbol in creation for earthly existence was the Garden of Eden. The primary existence for heavenly or eternal life is the New Jerusalem. We find a description of the New Jerusalem in the Book of

---

<sup>138</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:49.

<sup>139</sup> The Apostles Creed

<sup>140</sup> The Nicene Creed

Revelation. Not everyone likes the Book of Revelation. I happen to think it's the most important book in the Christian Covenant. Without it we would not have a description of what life in the Kingdom of God will be like. Of course much of what we read in the Book of Revelation is symbolic, but symbols communicate to the heart. At this point I'm only interested in the description of the Kingdom of God within the New Jerusalem. The first thing that is clear is that there will be a final judgment. This is consistent with Jesus' Parable of the Judgment of Nations.<sup>141</sup> The description of that judgment is given in Revelation 20:11-12 and 15:

Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. ...and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

It sounds like a record has been kept of our works and that we will be judged according to our works. This would be consistent with Jesus' parable, where the sheep are placed on his right side because they fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, and visited the prisoners.<sup>142</sup> I believe that this book records the names of those who exercised FAITH. It was James who said, "faith without works is dead."<sup>143</sup> Those who have Faith will express it in works. Martin Luther agreed and said, "...it is impossible, indeed, to separate works from faith,

---

<sup>141</sup> Matthew 25:32-46.

<sup>142</sup> Matthew 25:34-36.

<sup>143</sup> James 2:26.

just as it is impossible to separate heat and light from the fire.”<sup>144</sup> The book of life does not calculate the difference between our good deeds and our bad deeds and judge us on whether our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds. The book of life contains all of the names of those who have exercised FAITH.



---

<sup>144</sup> Martin Luther, *Introduction to the Book of Romans*.



Those whose names are not found in the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire, reserved for the devil and his angels.<sup>145</sup> This is consistent with Jesus' teaching. We must be careful of taking this too literally. The point being made is there will be no evil in the Kingdom of God or in the New Jerusalem. Quite a few things, with which we are familiar, will not be present in Heaven.<sup>146</sup> They are (1) the sea, (2) death and suffering, (3) the Temple, (4) the sun and moon, (5) the night, and (6) sin.<sup>147</sup> The absence of the sea needs a little explanation. The Jews always had dread of the sea, For them, the sea was linked with evil. The beast (the antichrist) came from the sea and was eventually cast into the lake of fire. The point being made is that there will be no evil and suffering in the New Jerusalem. God's presence will eliminate all evil and suffering.

See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.<sup>148</sup>

While it is easy to understand the absence of evil, suffering, and death, what about the absence of the Temple? First, it must be pointed out that the Temple as a building was never God's idea. God wanted his people to be a living Temple. This concept can be found in both the Hebrew and Christian Covenants. In the Book of Revelation we discover why no Temple as a building is needed.

---

<sup>145</sup> Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10 and 15.

<sup>146</sup> Heaven, the Kingdom of God, and the New Jerusalem refer to the same thing.

<sup>147</sup> See Revelation 21:1, 4, 22, 23, 25, 27 and 22:3 and 5.

<sup>148</sup> Revelation 21:3-4.

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.<sup>149</sup>

The gates will never be shut, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life will want to enter. When they enter they will find something else that is absent, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>150</sup> In its place will be a river flowing through the street of the city, and on either side of the river will be the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.<sup>151</sup>

We may eat of every tree for all evil has been destroyed. The invitation has been offered to all.

It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star,

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come."  
And let everyone who hears say, "Come."

---

<sup>149</sup> Revelation 21:22-25.

<sup>150</sup> Genesis 2:16-17.

<sup>151</sup> Revelation 22:1-2.

And let everyone who is thirsty come.  
Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a  
gift.<sup>152</sup>



Listen! I am standing at the door knocking;  
if you hear my voice and open the door,  
I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.

**Revelation 3:20**

After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open!  
And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me  
like a trumpet, said,  
“Come up here, and I will show you  
what must take place after this.”

**Revelation 4:1**

---

<sup>152</sup> Revelation 22:16-17.



## AFTERWORD

More could be said, but my intention was to keep it brief. This is the way in which I have worked out my salvation. These are the choices I have made. Will some of my choices change in the future? Certainly. I am open to change and to criticism of the way in which I have worked out my salvation. I would also like to read accounts of how others have worked out their salvation.

I have done something different from what I usually do. I tried to use pictures along the way to illustrate some of my ideas. I did not find this easy to do, but I found it very helpful and rewarding.

In closing, I would like to share two brief prayers that mean a great deal to me. The first one defines my prayer for a greater vision and the second one describes my desire to be open to the God who can confirm my ideas or change them.<sup>153</sup>

Lord, make me see thy glory in every place.

*Michelangelo, 1475-1564*

Lord, come to me, my door is open.

*Michel Quoist*

**James T. Reuteler, Ph.D.**

[Jim@Reuteler.org](mailto:Jim@Reuteler.org)

[www.Jim.Reuteler.org](http://www.Jim.Reuteler.org)

---

<sup>153</sup> *The Complete Book of Christian Prayer*, (New York: Continuum, 1998), p. 7.



# OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

## BIBLE STUDY GUIDES

1. **The Bible as Sacred History:**  
Survey of the Bible
2. **The Struggle with God:**  
Genesis through Deuteronomy
3. **Sacred Stories:**  
Joshua through Esther
4. **The Search for Wisdom:**  
Job through Ecclesiastes
5. **Time is Running Out:**  
Major and Minor Prophets
6. **Between the Testaments:**  
Books of the Apocrypha
7. **The Messengers:**  
The Four Gospels
8. **An Explosion of Faith:**  
Acts and Revelation
9. **The First E-Letters:**  
All of the Letters
10. **The Second Creation:**  
Revelation (Formatted: 6x9)
11. **A Vision of Hope:**  
Revelation: (Formatted 8.5x11)
12. **New Testament Photos 1**
13. **New Testament Photos 2**

## BOOKS

1. **Ignited for Mission:**  
A Call to Missions
2. **Reformulating the Mission of the Church:**  
A Theology of Missions
3. **Our Spiritual Senses:**  
Five Spiritual Senses
4. **Our Spiritual Disciplines:**  
Six Spiritual Disciplines
5. **The Ordinary Christian Experience:**  
Fourteen Common Experiences
6. **Faith is a Choice:**  
Choosing Faith and Morality
7. **A Brief Story of the Christian Church:**  
A Survey of the Church
8. **The Heart of Methodism:**  
Renewing the Church

## EDITED BY THE AUTHOR

1. **Foundational Documents:**  
Basic Methodist Documents
2. **Instructions for Children:**  
by John Wesley
3. **Speaking Iban:**  
by Burr Baughman
4. **The Essentials of Methodism:**  
Basic Methodist Beliefs

