

The Way

“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 18:3

(All Bible quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise indicated.)

Jesus

prayed His followers would be in **complete unity**,
sanctified (set apart) **by the truth**.¹

In this same night, Jesus gave His disciples three commandments: to wash one another's feet; to remember His death; and to love one another. Then He said to them, "**if you love Me, keep My commandments, and I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper . . . the Spirit of truth.**"²

In the beginning, Jesus' disciples loved one another following His example in one baptism,³ the remembrance of His death, and the washing of feet. And all drank of one Spirit.

Jesus instructed His disciples to "make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."⁴ But within 150 years, new teachings, including "Easter" were declared as "doctrines" of the Church to Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–180 AD).⁵ The Church was no longer united by the example of Jesus and His teachings.

In 177 AD, the Bishop of Rome wrote letters of excommunication to the churches of Asia because they disagreed on these new "doctrines."⁶ Church history records another event in the reign of Marcus Aurelius: all spiritual gifts ceased.⁷ The evidence of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, was taken from the Church.

Did you know that today, only those who obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ receive the comfort of the Holy Spirit, **the Spirit of truth**, as evidenced by the tongue emitting sound?

Through the Spirit, God has revealed the way to unity, that Jesus' prayer might be fulfilled,

"that the world may believe that You sent Me."

¹ John 17:17–23.

² John 14:15–16, 23.

³ 1 John 2:27.

⁴ Matthew 28:19, 20.

⁵ Eusebius (bishop of the Emperor), "The Church History," 324 AD, Book 4.26.

⁶ Ibid. Book 5.7.

⁷ Ibid. Book 5.24.

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The
Way

“According to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.”⁸

The Apostle Paul, 60 AD

Every man, when he considers the beauty and greatness of creation, even his own body, mind, and spirit, knows that life came into being, not by chance, but that a creator is behind all that we see.

The Apostle Paul tells us that

“For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and divine nature, so that they are without excuse, because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.”⁹

The Bible is the history of man and God, and its account of that history dates back as far as the existence of man is scientifically proven. Through the Bible, we find the origin of all religions that believe in one God, who created the heavens and the earth.

The Bible tells us that through the first man, Adam, sin entered the world, and man was separated from relationship with God. The Bible also tells us the world was very different in those days, that a mist covered the earth, and that it did not rain. And for nearly two thousand years, the Spirit of God strived with men. However, in the end, none sought after God, and the world became full of evil. And God regretted He created the earth and destroyed the earth with a flood, saving only one man, Noah, and his family, whom He found righteous. Noah built an ark according to God’s instructions and was saved.

And God made a covenant with Noah. And Noah’s sons were Shem, Ham, and Japheth, who became the fathers of the races of mankind we know today. And from Shem’s descendants came Abraham. And God found Abraham righteous, because of his faith.

So God made a covenant with Abraham, that through his seed all nations would be blessed. And we know Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael became the father of the Arab people, who later through the sword returned to their belief in one god. Isaac’s descendants were taken into captivity by the Egyptians for four hundred years, until Moses led them out. And Moses gave us the commandments of God, and for Isaac’s descendants, the Jewish people, Moses gave laws by which they were to serve God.

From the Jewish people, God raised up prophets who told of a king through the line of David, whose “kingdom would have no end.” And from the prophet Isaiah, God told of one who would be an offering for the sin of many.

“He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions . . . Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief; when You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, and He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.”¹⁰

The Prophet Isaiah

700 BC

The servant of whom Isaiah speaks we know to be Jesus Christ, who came as the King whose kingdom would know no end, to lay on Himself the sins of all mankind. Isaiah writes,

⁸ Acts 24:14.

⁹ Romans 1:20–23.

¹⁰ Isaiah 53.

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end.”¹¹

Not born of any man, this servant, was, as the Apostle John tells us, the Word who came in the flesh. He came to show “The Way” to the Father, the way of salvation for all mankind, even as He promised to Abraham, that through his seed all people would be blessed—fulfilling, not only this promise but more than three hundred other prophecies, as written in the Law and the Prophets.

“I am the Way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”¹²

Jesus Christ

29 AD

¹¹ Isaiah 9:6, 7.

¹² John 14:6.

I Am the
Way

“The Son can do nothing of Himself, **unless** it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner . . . **as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.**”

John 5:19–20 NASB

Many of us have heard the expression, “What would Jesus do?”

When we talk about the true Christian faith, we talk about the imitation of Christ. In fact, the original meaning of the word Christian is “little Christ.” The true path of following Christ is simply to imitate Him, to become like Him, to be transformed into His image, as we were created to be.

Our desire to imitate Christ is the completion of God’s desire expressed in the beginning of creation, “let Us make man in Our image.”¹³ God predestined us “to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”¹⁴

Jesus Himself became The Way, the example of the faith for His disciples, as the Apostle Paul writes, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”¹⁵

As disciples of Jesus, we follow only the example of Christ, and not the teaching of any church, or person. We have only one teacher,¹⁶ who is Jesus Christ.

The elementary teachings of The Way are the teachings of salvation; the Way to the Father, and these we find listed for us in Hebrews 6:1 and 2.

“Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms (washings¹⁷), the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment” (New International Version).

Of course, for our purposes, we are going to begin with these elementary teachings so we can understand The Way, and in the final section we will discuss maturity in Christ.

Repentance from acts that lead to death

“**No one can come to Me unless** the Father who sent Me draws him.”

John 6:44, 65

Jesus became our example in righteousness. Though Jesus was sinless for His whole life, we see His first act after baptism was to reject all the ways of sin. Immediately after being baptized, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, and, using the word of God, He refuted the devil’s temptations.

Likewise, the first thing we must do is to reject all the ways of sin, in particular those that lead to the death of our souls.

The Apostle Paul writes, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God.”¹⁸

¹³ Genesis 1:26.

¹⁴ Romans 8:29.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1.

¹⁶ Matthew 23:10.

¹⁷ New American Standard, Darby, and Holman translations.

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Ephesians 5:5.

“Unless you see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.”

John 4:48 (NKJV adds *people*)

Jesus, above all, became our example of faith, and spent most of His ministry demonstrating the power of faith in God, that we can trust God, that He is good, that His thoughts toward us are love. Jesus says, “ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”¹⁹

And so “he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”²⁰

We enter the teachings of Jesus, because this is the Way and the power of the Holy Spirit to salvation. But it is our faith toward God that saves us.

If we put our trust in God, we will be saved from the sins that separate us from abundant life, from the life that God desires for us.

“I have come that they may have life; and that they may have it more abundantly.”²¹

Just as Abraham, the father of faith, followed God’s instructions and left his country to go to a place he did not know, we must follow God to the place He has prepared for us.

The path to salvation and abundant life begins with baptism.

Instruction about baptisms (washings)

“You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized.”²²

We begin our path, as we would end it, in the imitation of Christ, “in like manner.” The example of baptism Jesus gave his followers is the only method of baptism to which the Holy Spirit testifies. The experience and joy of a new believer in the imitation of Jesus’ baptism is indescribable. Through His baptism, we become like Him; we become a child of God.

Our baptism is not only the expression of our desire to become like Christ, it is the washing away of our sins,²³ just as we read earlier: “but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus.”²⁴

The authority to wash away our sins comes from the sacrifice of Jesus Himself on the cross, and from the Holy Spirit. The Apostle John writes, “There are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood.”²⁵

Because baptism is the washing away of our sins, it is important that the one who baptizes us has spiritual authority. Just as John the Baptist was given spiritual authority through the Holy Spirit, Jesus breathed authority into his disciples, saying, “receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them.”²⁶ The one who baptizes us must be filled with the Holy Spirit; God’s kingdom is established by spiritual authority.

But if baptism is only the washing of sins, why did the followers of The Way travel perhaps more than a day’s journey to a river to imitate the baptism of Jesus? In Jesus’ day, Jerusalem had many pools and baths in which to wash.

¹⁹ John 16:24.

²⁰ Hebrews 11:6.

²¹ John 10:10.

²² Mark 10:39.

²³ Acts 2:38, 22:16.

²⁴ | Corinthians 6:9–10; Acts 2:38; 8:12; 8:16; 10:48; 19:15.

²⁵ | John 5:7–8.

²⁶ John 20:22–23.

(The imitation of the baptism of Jesus by the early Christians in rivers is well documented in the famous history of baptism by Jules Corbert, *Histoire Dogmatique, Liturgique et Archeologique du Sacrament de Baptême, Vol 2*. Early Church fathers such as Justin, Clement, Victor I, and Tertullian remark that seas, lakes, ponds, and springs are equally proper sites.)

Only living water produces life; our baptism is a rebirth, our baptism brings life. Jesus came to bring life and life abundantly, and promised that if anyone would follow Him, “out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”²⁷ We do not enter a religion made by man, but by God, so we go to a river, lake, sea, or spring because we seek “a pure river of water of life.”²⁸

Though we follow the example of Christ in the method and elements of baptism, and remembrance of His death,²⁹ **it makes no difference where³⁰ or when³¹** we do this. The Apostle Paul tells us, “you died with Christ (through baptism) from the basic principles of the world . . . and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”³²

Through baptism **we die with Christ** to sin, and to mortal life in this world, **and so we enter the water**, as Paul writes, “**in the likeness of His death.**”³³ As Christ bowed His head³⁴ when He breathed His last, we bow our heads when we enter the water in the imitation of His baptism, and are “raised from the dead by the glory of the Father . . . in newness of life.”³⁵

“**Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me.**”
John 13:8 NIV

Finally, if we remember the commandments of Christ in His last hours, we will remember the example Jesus gave His disciples, that they should wash one another’s feet. And, coming from the river, after baptism, is probably the first time a new believer would have his feet washed by his new brothers and sisters, as his feet would be dirty coming out of the river. As Jesus says, “he who is bathed needs only to wash his feet.”³⁶

The washing of feet gives us many teachings including humility and service and the attitude of Christ that we must learn as we continue in our imitation of Christ.

But the most significant teaching is the spiritual teaching Jesus’ disciples could not understand until after the Church was established.

“Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me.”³⁷

We must allow Christ, “the body of Christ,” to wash our feet. Our salvation is not an individual effort; to have a part with Christ, we must allow the body of Christ to serve us so that we can be saved from the ways of this world.

When we become Jesus’ disciples, we are united with Jesus through the same baptism, the same cup, and the same washing of our feet.

²⁷ John 7:38.

²⁸ Revelation 21:6; 22:1; Ezekiel 47:1.

²⁹ I Corinthians 5:8; 10:16–17.

³⁰ John 4:21–24.

³¹ Galatians 4:3, 10 NIV.

³² Colossians 2:20; 3:3.

³³ Romans 6:5.

³⁴ John 19:30.

³⁵ Romans 6:4.

³⁶ John 13:10.

³⁷ John 13:7–8 NIV.

Laying on of hands

“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

John 3:5

Jesus becomes the first of many brothers, as He comes out of the water of baptism, and the Holy Spirit descends on Him. In doing so, He sets the example of “The Way.”

Peter declares, “repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”³⁸

Through water and the Spirit we are “born again”; see also Romans 6:3–4 and Colossians 2:12. We enter the new life, as Jesus explains to Nicodemus in John 3:5–8, “unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God . . . the wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

The descent of the Spirit is God’s affirmation that we have been accepted as a son, just as when the Spirit descended on Christ, a voice was heard from heaven, saying, “this is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”³⁹ The Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of adoption”⁴⁰ and “the guarantee of our inheritance.”⁴¹

Of course, as humans we are rarely in the perfect situation where we believe, are baptized immediately, God sees our faith, and we receive the Spirit as we come up from the water. The Holy Spirit is not received automatically after baptism and is often imparted through “the laying on of hands”; see Acts 8:14–17. The Spirit may also descend before baptism; see Acts 10:44–47. Still today, we see the Spirit descending before and after baptism. And a believer may require prayer to receive the Spirit; see Luke 11:5–13.

Resurrection of the dead

Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is one of the most significant events of the Christian faith.

Today, many are of Christian heritage and it is normal to believe in the resurrection of the dead, but before Christ’s resurrection, this belief in the resurrection of the dead was not even held by many Jews. And so, in fact, the first Christians simply preached a message of “eternal life,” that death had been overcome by Christ.

To those who believe, the resurrection of the dead is a reason to hope, but also a reason to fear, because, without resurrection, none of us face judgment.

The Apostle Paul defends the resurrection with these words:

“Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?”⁴²

Eternal judgment

We know the dead will rise and every man will face judgment, but those who remain in Christ until the end shall not come into judgment.

Jesus says:

³⁸ Acts 2:38.

³⁹ Matthew 3:17.

⁴⁰ Romans 8:15.

⁴¹ Ephesians 1:14.

⁴² I Corinthians 15:29–30.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life . . .

“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice, and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”⁴³

Of course, we must be careful about our confidence in eternal life. We show we believe in Jesus if we keep His commandments, and walk in His path of salvation.

And if we return to our ways of sin, once we have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, there remains no more sacrifice for our sins.⁴⁴ So we must learn about maturity in Christ, and the power that keeps us from falling, which we will study in the final section, “I am the Life.”

⁴³ John 5:24, 28, 29.

⁴⁴ Hebrews 6:4–6, Hebrews 10:26–31; Matthew 7:21–23; 24:44–51; 25:1–13; Ezekiel 18.

I Am the
Truth

Other religions

“Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 18:3

All of the significant religions in the world have an opinion about Jesus Christ. Some call Him a prophet, and some a good man. But Jesus Himself said He is more than a good man, or a prophet. Jesus told us, “no one comes to the Father except through Me.”⁴⁵

So we must all answer the question: Is Jesus Christ really who He claimed to be?

Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is one of His greatest proofs.

The Bible records nine occasions of Jesus’ appearance after His resurrection. Paul writes,

“He was seen by Cephas (Peter), then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as one born out of due time.”⁴⁶

As Paul states, he writes among the current witnesses of Christ’s resurrection. And we know from history, the Apostles’ testimony to the resurrection of Jesus was tested under torture, and for all but John, with their lives.

The truth we know in our hearts, first, by the truth. The words and example of love and truth left by Jesus Christ and His followers are their greatest evidence. So we can be confident that Jesus Christ is everything He claimed to be, and when we put our trust in Him, our sins will be forgiven.

Jesus’ prayer for the complete unity of His followers

Just before His crucifixion, Jesus lifts His eyes toward heaven and prays:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son,
that Your Son also may glorify You.”

Then He prays for His disciples and His followers:

“Sanctify them by Your truth.”

“I do not pray for these alone,
but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;
that they all may be one, as You, Father, in Me, and I in You;
that they also may be one in Us,
that the world may believe that You sent Me.”⁴⁷

In the beginning, Jesus’ Church was united in one Spirit, and followed His commandments of baptism, the washing of feet, and the breaking of bread, according to the example He set for them.

But churches began developing their own traditions. And eventually these traditions became doctrines, and churches were separated by the teachings of men.

In recent years, believers all over the world have been praying for unity. Believers everywhere are experiencing the movement of the Spirit, and this movement of the Spirit is breaking down denominational barriers. But the complete unity Jesus prayed for is still to come.

Why should we believe Jesus’ prayer for complete unity is possible? Because we know that just before Jesus prays, He tells His disciples, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ John 14:6.

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:5–8.

⁴⁷ John 17:1, 20, 21.

⁴⁸ John 16:23.

Through the Spirit, Jesus is leading His followers into complete unity.

The unity of Jews and Gentiles – “One New Man”

Jesus’ prayer for the complete unity of believers includes both Jews and Gentiles.

But the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers is difficult to see, when we read the short history of the New Testament.

After Jesus’ resurrection, Jewish believers continued to observe the Laws of Moses. The Gentiles kept only the teachings of Jesus.

Many Jewish believers thought the Gentiles should also keep the Laws of Moses.

In Jerusalem, the Apostles met to resolve the issue, which we can read about in Acts 15. The council in Jerusalem, moved by the Holy Spirit, reached the following conclusion: “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.”⁴⁹

When we read the letters of Paul to the churches in the Gentile cities, we see that he is repeatedly telling the Gentile believers they need not keep the Law of Moses. But we must realize Paul’s philosophical arguments are for the ears of all believers.

The highlight of Paul’s effort to bring about the unity of Jews and Gentiles is found in His letter to the Ephesians:

“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and **has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances**, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.”⁵⁰

Paul is telling us the Law of Moses is no longer required for the Gentiles, or the Jews, that God might make “one new man from the two.”

So most definitely, Jesus’ prayer is for all believers!

The Spirit of truth

“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

In these last days, God is leading His people by the Spirit, back into the truth that can unite all believers, in preparation for the return of the Lord.

Jesus promised:

“when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Acts 15:28-29

⁵⁰ Ephesians 2:11-16.

⁵¹ John 16:13.

If you love Me

The Spirit of truth is the promise of Jesus to those who keep His commandments.

After Jesus instructed His disciples in the washing of feet, and the remembrance of His death, He said to them,

“If you love me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—**the Spirit of truth** . . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come and make our home with him.”⁵²

We receive the Spirit through one baptism

One baptism is the central truth of unity in doctrine. As the Apostle Paul, by the inspiration of the Spirit, wrote,

“There is . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”⁵³

This one baptism, we know, is according to the example of Jesus, in the name of Jesus.

In the name of Jesus

In his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul explains why the disciples baptized in the name of Jesus (see Acts 2:38; 8:12; 8:16; 10:48; 19:15; 22:16; 1 Corinthians 1:13; 6:9–10).

Paul tells us that after Jesus endured the cross, He was given “the name which is above every name”:

“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth.”⁵⁴

Of course, we know the name of Jesus did not change, but rather God gave “the name” of Jesus a new meaning.

After His resurrection, Jesus revealed the new meaning of His name when He said,

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁵

That very day, Jesus’ words fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah:

“And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be—The LORD is one, and His name one.”⁵⁶

And this is why the disciples baptized “in the name of Jesus.” Like Paul, they understood “the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit” is Jesus—the only name used for God in the New Testament.

But as time went on, maybe believers forgot Jesus’ introductory words, “All authority has been given to Me,” and began using the phrase “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” in their baptisms, believing this would give their baptisms the “authority” of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? But all authority had been given to Jesus.

(See also John 8:28; 12:32; 13:19; and 13:32b)

⁵² John 14:17.

⁵³ Ephesians 4:5.

⁵⁴ Philippians 2:8–10.

⁵⁵ Matthew 28:18–19.

⁵⁶ Zechariah 15:9.

The Spirit testifies to one baptism

In Acts 19, we find the Spirit's testimony to one baptism.

Coming to Ephesus, Paul encounters some believers and questions them:

“did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? So they said to him, ‘We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.’ And he said to them, ‘into what then were you baptized?’ So they said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.’ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues (laleo te glossa) and prophesied.”⁵⁷

Though these Ephesian disciples believed and were following Jesus’ teachings, they could not receive the Spirit of truth, because they had not been baptized into Jesus’ baptism, but only into John’s baptism.

And so it is to the Ephesian believers that Paul wrote, “There is . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

So we must ask: Why is this one baptism so significant to God?

One baptism is not only the symbol of unity; God desires to make us in His own image. This is the desire He expressed in the beginning of creation. And so we begin our faith as we would end it, in the imitation of Christ.

Jesus showed us the way to the kingdom of heaven through His baptism. Coming up from the water, the Spirit descended on Him, just as John the Baptist remarked, “I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁸

Jesus’ baptism was restored by the Holy Spirit in 1917, in a message to a simple believer, “You must be baptized with the baptism of Jesus.”

And the Spirit poured out through this obedience was in great comfort. This Spirit, the Spirit of truth, causes the tongue to emit sound as it enters, just as it did in the book of Acts. And today, this same Spirit is shared by nearly two million believers, the vast majority of whom are in China, but also in 48 countries throughout the world (Ezekiel 47:1–8).

With more than 90 years of history, the testimony of the Spirit is now remarkable, consistent, and proven. Consistently, over this 90-year period, we find, for example, believers that began neglecting this true baptism have lost the comfort of the Holy Spirit. And this has been well documented in the United States, India, and China. In China alone, more than 50,000 believers, who were forced into state-controlled churches, lost the Holy Spirit’s comfort, and are now regaining the comforting power of the Spirit through rebaptism.

The Apostle John wrote,

“As for you, the anointing you received from Him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about all things and **as that anointing is real, not counterfeit**—just as it has taught you, remain in Him.”⁵⁹

The Holy Spirit and the Spirit of truth

⁵⁷ Acts 19:2–6.

⁵⁸ Mark 1:8.

⁵⁹ 1 John 2:27, NIV.

With the outpouring of the Spirit, in the past century, there has been no shortage of mystery or debate about whether a person can be “led by,” or even “receive” the Holy Spirit, before they receive the “gift of the Holy Spirit,” the promised comforter, “the Spirit of truth.”

The Apostle John himself seems to distinguish the receipt of the Holy Spirit from the “gift of the Holy Spirit . . . the Spirit of truth.”

John records that just before Jesus ascended to heaven, He breathed on His disciples, saying “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them: if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”⁶⁰

But later, in the book of Acts, Jesus told His disciples to wait for “the gift of the Holy Spirit,” and to “wait for the Promise of the Father, which . . . you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”⁶¹

To add to the mystery: receiving the Spirit of truth, the promised comforter, requires a condition from Jesus; but the promise of the Holy Spirit mentions no condition:

“If you then, being evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?”⁶²

And we know from experience that any Christian can receive a gift of “different kinds of tongues,” or the interpretation of tongues, or prophecy, or healing or any of the spiritual gifts described for us in I Corinthians 12: 7–10.

But we also know that on the judgment day, many will say “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” And (Jesus) will declare to them, “I never knew you.”⁶³ And we know that these people could not have received the “Spirit of truth,” or the Holy Spirit. Because Jesus Himself comes in the Spirit of truth, as He tells us, “if anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him and We will come and make our home with him.”⁶⁴ So with whom does Jesus make His home, and later say, “I never knew you?”

The Apostle John writes, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God: because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.” . . . “We are of God. He who knows God knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”⁶⁵

We can only know for sure that the spirit we have received is the promised “Spirit of truth” by the teachings we follow, and by the evidence given to us in the Bible, the evidence of the tongue emitting sound.

“Speaking with other tongues” or “Speaking with tongues?”

“If you knew the gift (dorea) of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” (John 4:10).

We must know a little Greek in order to really understand the Bible’s evidence of the “gift of the Holy Spirit,” the Spirit of truth.

Many know that the Greek word for “gift,” as in “gift of the Holy Spirit,” is “dorea,” as in Acts 2:38, 8:20, 10:45, 11:17, and Hebrews 6:4, and that the Greek word for “gift,” as in the gift of “other tongues,” is “charisma,” as in 1 Corinthians 7:7, 12:4,

⁶⁰ John 20:22–23.

⁶¹ Acts 1:4–5.

⁶² Luke 11:13.

⁶³ Matthew 7:21–23.

⁶⁴ John 14:23.

⁶⁵ 1 John 4:1–6.

9, 28, 30, and 31, 1 Timothy 4:14, and 1 Peter 4:10. This assures us that the “gift (dorea) of the Holy Spirit” is not a spiritual gift (charisma) of speaking with “other tongues.”

But fewer are familiar with the meaning of the Greek words behind the expressions: speaking with “other tongues” in Acts 2:4 and “speaking with tongues” in Acts 10:46.

In Acts 2:4, we find the expression “speaking with other tongues”:

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues (heteros glossa), as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Here, the Greek words underlying speaking with “other tongues” are “heteros glossa,” meaning “other tongues.”

But, in Acts 10:45–46, we find another expression: “speaking with tongues”:

“And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came to Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues (laleo glossa) and magnify God.”

The expression “speaking with tongues” in Acts 10:46 is the composition of two words, “glossa”—tongue—and “laleo”—emit sound, as in thunder, echo, or to utter sound.⁶⁶ And this simply means the tongue is “emitting sound.”

This combination of Greek words, “laleo glossa,” is found, not only in the Book of Acts, but also ten times in 1 Corinthians 12–14. It is not found elsewhere in Greek literature, nor is it a Greek expression for speaking with “other languages.” But, rather, it is the evidence of the Spirit of truth.

This may be a surprise to many, so to fully understand this, let us first discuss “speaking with other tongues.”

Speaking with other tongues

We find the first experience of “speaking with other tongues” on the first descent of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:4. The disciples waited in an upper room for Jesus’ promise, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues (heteros glossa), as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Spiritual gifts, “charisma” gifts of “different kinds of tongues,” and gifts of prophecy are sometimes received by believers when they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Some believe that spiritual gifts, “charisma” gifts of other human languages were received on the first descent of the Holy Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 12–14, the Apostle Paul describes “charisma” gifts. Paul says that the Spirit distributes to some, a gift of “different kinds of tongues” (12:10), (heteros glossa), and “languages” of “men or angels” (13:2). And these are tongues that can be interpreted (14:13, 28). Paul asks, “do all speak with tongues?” (12:30)—meaning not all who receive the gift of the Holy Spirit speak with tongues that can be understood.

Paul goes on to say, “tongues (languages) are a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers,” (14:22) and this is the case in Acts 2. The unbelievers who hear the disciples speaking in their own native languages believe and are baptized.

But in fact, in Acts 2, we do not even know whether the “other tongues” spoken were human languages, or whether the Spirit simply enabled those devout men present to hear the “other tongues” in their own languages, as all who heard remarked, “how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?” (Acts 2:8).

⁶⁶ Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Edinburgh, 1896, Fourth Edition, p. 368.

The tongue emitting sound:

the evidence of the promised Comforter, the Spirit of truth

Acts 2, 10, and 19 are the three passages in which the Bible evidences the descent of the Holy Spirit with signs. The account in Acts 8 does not discuss any signs.

In Acts 10, we find what some believe is a better description of the “other tongues” spoken in Acts 2, and that is the “tongue emitting sound.”

The difference in Acts 10 is that there is no evidence of a “charisma” gift of “other languages.” The Bible does not record that any other languages were heard or spoken. Because now, there are no unbelievers present, and as the Apostle Paul wrote, “tongues (the gift of ‘other languages’) are a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers” (1 Corinthians 14:22).

In Acts 10, there is no need for a sign of “other languages.” Nor is there any manifestation of charisma tongues, followed by prophecy or interpretation, like we find in Acts 19:6.

In Acts 10, God’s purpose is only to show Peter and the circumcised believers that the Gentile believers have received the same Holy Spirit. And they recognize the Spirit when they hear the “tongue emitting sound” (*laleo glossa*).

Let us read Acts 10:45–47:

“And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came to Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues (*laleo glossa*) and magnify God.”

To which Peter replied:

“Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *have*?”

Today, we find the same evidence whenever the Holy Spirit enters. In churches that follow the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the experience of “speaking with tongues”—*laleo glossa*—begins when the Spirit enters. And the Spirit causes the tongue to emit sound whenever the believer prays in the Spirit.

Jesus promised, “‘Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within Him.’ By this He meant the Spirit.”⁶⁷ When the Spirit enters, believers are inwardly stirred, from “the belly” or “heart,”⁶⁸ and the back of the tongue emits sound. The most salient part of the experience is the Spirit entering, and not the sound being made.

A different spirit

Many believers, in almost every denomination, “speak with tongues” by moving their mouths in the development of a prayer language. And this is much different than “the tongue emitting sound.”

Moving one’s mouth in a type of prayer language is an experience that is not unique to the Christian religion.

Beginning in the 1830s, believers of one sect began praying like this. And these believers followed the doctrine of an “angel from heaven,”⁶⁹ as Satan took advantage of the confusion among churches in the search for the truth. Many, like the believers of this church, after praying “in tongues,” by moving the mouth, simply stop because they don’t see the point in it.

But there are some who “pray in tongues” only by moving the mouth, who believe they have received a spiritual language, and also testify to living water when they pray. And this distinction is a spiritual mystery.

⁶⁷ John 7:38, NIV

⁶⁸ KJV, and NKJV

⁶⁹ Galatians 1:8

However, we know when these same believers receive the Spirit of truth, as evidenced by the tongue emitting sound, they always testify the comfort of God is now greater. Most, who previously prayed “in tongues,” by moving the mouth, simply have the testimony, “this is the real thing.” The power and comfort of the Spirit they receive becomes God’s testimony that they are now following the true gospel.

The Apostle Paul tells us:

“if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive **a different spirit** which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!”⁷⁰

And so God still separates the true gospel for us by the Holy Spirit. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.”⁷¹

The use of spiritual gifts of languages in the Church

Before finishing our discussion of “speaking in tongues,” we must clarify some matter of confusion regarding Paul’s instruction in the use of spiritual languages in the church.

As we mentioned earlier, in 1 Corinthians 12–14, Paul is talking about spiritual gifts, and a spiritual gift of “different kinds of tongues,” of different languages (heteros glossa) (12:9) (“though I speak with the tongues of men and angels” [13:1]).

Paul tells us that the church at Corinth was trying to use these gifts of different languages (heteros glossa) to minister to each other. Paul encouraged them to speak with other languages if they could interpret. But some were getting carried away and trying to minister to each other, even when no one could interpret what they were speaking. So Paul instructs them to “keep silent,” unless they are able to interpret. He tells them that they should pray only to themselves and to God (1 Corinthians 14:28, 34). The meaning of “keep silent” is not that they cannot speak at all, but that they should not instruct with these languages in the meeting; see also verse 34.

Paul is not forbidding personal prayer to God in tongues in Church meetings.

Worship in Spirit and truth

The message of Christ is much more than His payment for our sins; He also establishes the relationship God desires with us. And this relationship, as we have described, is a relationship in the Holy Spirit.

Before Jesus came, the Old Covenant relationship between God and His people was one of the observances of days and regulations. The priests prayed to God on behalf of the people. Even the relationship of the priests to God was very distant. Once a year, the high priest would go into a special chamber to meet with God. This meeting was very fearful, because if the priest entered this meeting with God, and had not atoned for his own sin, he could die.

But Jesus paid the penalty for our sin so that we are able to enter into “the most Holy place,” a relationship with Him in the Spirit, by His blood.

This “New Covenant” is one of direct fellowship with God in the Spirit. Jesus’ gospel did away with the observance of days and regulations. Jesus taught us to worship God in spirit and truth, through the baptism of His Spirit, and through the remembrance of His sacrifice for our sins.

Through the prophet Hosea, the Spirit speaks of this new relationship:

⁷⁰ 2 Corinthians 11:4.

⁷¹ Hebrews 13:8.

“I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, her Sabbaths—all her appointed feasts . . . Therefore, behold I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her . . . And it shall be **in that day**, says the Lord, that **you will call Me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer call Me ‘My Master.’**”

The observance of days, which kept man at a distance from God, will be replaced by a New Covenant of true intimacy, true worship, by the body and blood of Christ, and by the Spirit—symbolically the bread, the wine, and the oil. **“The earth shall answer with grain, with new wine, and with oil; they shall answer Jezreel.”**⁷²

Jesus talks about this New Covenant to the Samaritan woman by the well:

“Believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither **on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem**, worship the Father . . . the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him **must worship in spirit and truth.**”⁷³

Hosea prophesied that the Gentiles would share a part in God’s New Covenant:

“. . . I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground” (Hosea 2:18; Acts 10:12).

“. . . I will call them My people, who were not My people” (Romans 9:25; Hosea 2:23).

But, very sadly, the Gentile believers very quickly departed from a relationship with God in the Spirit, and began to reinstate the distance from God of the Old Covenant, beginning with the observance of the religious days “Easter” and “The Lord’s Day.” Soon, the Easter celebration was made longer and longer, until it was 40 days long; new religious days were added, and finally even priests were reinstated! Man was no longer one with God, joined in the Spirit, but was once again completely distanced from God; all beginning with Easter.

“A little leaven leavens the whole lump.”⁷⁴

How did this happen?

Many of the early Gentile believers were used to the ways of their pagan religions, which liked to “use” their gods to make better lives for the worshippers. For example, pagan worshippers liked to celebrate when the days were getting shorter as a way of cheering themselves. And we know that today’s “Christian festivals” originated from these pagan days of worship. As early as 279 AD, the Church created the Christmas festival to celebrate the birth of Christ on December 25, “the birth of the unconquered sun.”

The Easter celebration of the resurrection of Christ came from the celebration of the resurrection of Tammus, the son of the goddess of fertility, Semiramis, also known as “Easter.” And this was the spring festival.

The Apostle Paul begged the Galatian Gentiles not to depart from the worship of God in the Spirit, not to depart from the love of God:

“But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods, but now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you desire to turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? **You observe days and months and seasons and years.** I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.”⁷⁵

Of course, there is nothing wrong with wanting to celebrate as the sun goes down, but God sent His Son because He no longer wants a relationship based on seasons or days and places—“worship on this mountain or in Jerusalem.” God wants to be worshipped “in Spirit,” “in spirit and truth.” Just as the Apostle Paul wrote, “You died with Christ from the basic

⁷² Hosea 2: 11, 14, 16.

⁷³ John 4:21–24.

⁷⁴ Galatians 5:9.

⁷⁵ Galatians 4:9–11.

principles of this world . . . set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”⁷⁶

Hosea named his first son Jezreel, “**Scattered**,” even as spiritual adultery has scattered God’s Church into many denominations (Ezekiel 34:7–12; John 10:11–16).

He named his last son Lo-Ammi, “**Not My People**,” even as God’s Church, having begun in the Spirit, left its first love (Revelation 2:4–5).

Hosea ends his prophecy with a prophecy for God’s adulterous bride: “**Go again**, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans.”⁷⁷

In the next section, we will see God’s response to a harlot who committed harlotry with the kings of this earth.

In vain they worship Me

“Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.”⁷⁸

The Church’s views on Easter were first formalized by Bishops Melito of Sardis and Apollinarius of Hierapolis in defenses addressed to Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–180 AD). By addressing these defenses to the Emperor, rather than the Church of God, the Church had entered a new era.

The Church was no longer united by the commandments of Christ, but by man’s authority and the traditions of men.

In 177 AD, the Bishop of Rome wrote letters of excommunication to the churches of Asia because they disagreed on these new “doctrines.”

Church history records that all spiritual gifts ceased in the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius. The evidence of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, was taken from the Church.

Many believe that they can worship God according to their own will. And there are many who believe that as long as they “love” God with fervency, that He will be happy with their worship. And of course, we know that many people in other religions feel the same way.

In Matthew 15, Jesus talked about the religious people of His day who tried to worship God according to their own will, and their own traditions:

“Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, ‘Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.’ He answered and said to them, ‘Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, “*Honor your father and your mother*”; and, “*He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.*” But you say, “Whoever says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me *is a gift to God*’ — “then he need not honor his father or mother.” **Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition . . .**”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Colossians 2:20; 3:2–3.

⁷⁷ Hosea 3: 1.

⁷⁸ Deuteronomy 12:32.

⁷⁹ Matthew 15: 1–6.

Many are very fervent in their worship of Jesus. They may give a lot of money to the Church. And they may even claim to be led by “a spirit” in what they do, and may even perform miracles in Jesus’ name. But in fact, they are only worshipping Jesus according to their own will. And God sees their worship as “lawlessness.”⁸⁰

No longer having the Spirit, Church leaders continued the adultery of the gospel. In 321 AD, Emperor Constantine made “The Lord’s Day” (Sunday), “**the venerable day of the sun,**” the day of rest for the Roman Empire. In spite of this, all churches, except in Rome and Alexandria, continued their practice of rest on the Sabbath (Saturday). But soon, churches began to prohibit even rest on the Sabbath day, the very day set aside by God. In 364 AD, a council at Laodicea issued the following edict: “Christians shall not **Judaize** and be idle on Saturday, but shall work on that day; but the Lord’s day they shall especially honour, and, as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. **If, however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be shut out from Christ.**”⁸¹

God is love, and His commandments are about the sharing of love with all men. “The Sabbath was made for man,”⁸² and not for the Jewish people alone. The Sabbath day was sanctified by God in the beginning of creation as a day of rest for all people; that one might love his neighbor as himself; that every man, whether Jew or Christian, or without calling, should rest and work in unity with one another. But through the actions of the Church, the Jewish people were further separated from the gospel, and the truth of God was lost.

And so Jesus tells us, “**In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.**”⁸³

Today, God is calling His Church to repentance.

Some believers now like to keep the “Ten Commandments” in their doctrines. And of course, God only objects when we keep the teachings of men as doctrines, because we know that the commandments of God are, as Paul says, “holy and just and good.”⁸⁴

But in restoring the truth of the Sabbath day, we must be careful we truly understand God’s will for His Church. Jesus tells us that in “the kingdom of heaven,” God’s commandments are only the minimum standard for righteousness.

Most certainly, God wants us to remember the Sabbath day and to keep it holy.⁸⁵ But if we have “died with Christ,” and no longer worship God according to “the basic principles of this world,” then now every day has become dedicated to God. And so Paul writes, “one man esteems one day above another, and another esteems every day.”⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Matthew 7:21–23.

⁸¹ Charles J. Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church*, translation by Henry N. Oxenham (Edinburgh, 1896) Vol. II, p. 316.

⁸² Mark 2:27.

⁸³ Matthew 15:9; Isaiah 29:13.

⁸⁴ Romans 7:12.

⁸⁵ Exodus 20:8.

⁸⁶ Romans 14:5.

I desire mercy, not sacrifice

“Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, **you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.**”

Matthew 5:20

The true will of God, and God’s commandments, are the subject of Jesus’ longest and most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says, “you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you, that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”⁸⁷

Understanding the true will of God is the duty of every believer. Sometimes, religious people can be so caught up by the letter and form of their religion, that they forget the main purpose of their religion: **to know God.**

As Jesus’ disciples walk through a grain field on the Sabbath day, they pick the grain to eat, and the Pharisees question Jesus, saying, “Look! your disciples are doing what is not lawful

to do on the Sabbath.”

The Sabbath was intended as a day of rest, but Jesus’ disciples needed to pluck the food because they were hungry.

Jesus replied, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is *One* greater than the temple. But if you had known what *this* means, ***I desire mercy and not sacrifice,***’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.”⁸⁸

The Pharisees had a wrong concept of God. They thought religion was an act of service to God, as a slave to a master.

The Pharisees could not see that God had given them laws because He loved them, because He wanted to help them, and because He wanted to show them how to love one another. The Pharisees had a religion, but they did not really know or understand God. Through the prophet Hosea, God tells us, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice, **and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.**”⁸⁹ God’s people had forgotten the true religion of the heart, the religion of love and justice.

And so God sought, for once and for all, to end the enmity of religion between Himself and man. And He offered His own blood as the final sacrifice for the sin of all mankind.⁹⁰

“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”⁹¹ “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’”⁹²

This New Covenant is not the earning of favor from God, but the acceptance of all of the riches of Christ, through adoption in His family.

⁸⁷ Matthew 5:27–28.

⁸⁸ Matthew 12:1–7.

⁸⁹ Hosea 6:6.

⁹⁰ Acts 20:28.

⁹¹ Hebrews 10:19, 22.

⁹² Romans 8:15.

Paul writes, "He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."⁹³

The standard of righteousness of the New Covenant is higher than the written code. It is the true love of God and every man from the heart.⁹⁴ Not as an act of religion, but as compelled by the love of Christ.⁹⁵

We may still want to give things up to draw closer to God. We may give up our televisions, our money, or even our food, but God does not want us to bow down our heads in an act of religion. Through the prophet Isaiah, God tells us the essence of true religion:

"Is it a fast that I have chosen,
A day for a man to afflict his soul?
Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush?
Is this not the fast that I have chosen:
To loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens,
To let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?
If you extend your soul to the hungry
And satisfy the afflicted soul,
Then your light shall dawn in the darkness,
And your darkness shall be as the noonday."⁹⁶

Enter by the narrow gate

"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone . . . He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world **will keep it for eternal life.**"

John 12:24–25

Maybe having read this, you are now wondering: Do I really need to be baptized and receive the Holy Spirit? Do I really need to do all these things Jesus said and follow His example?

Jesus tells us, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able."⁹⁷

"Enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."⁹⁸

The narrow gate is the path of Jesus' teachings, the Way.

The Way is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the worship of God in the Spirit, the Spirit of God working in us, the power that transforms us into the image of Christ.

Paul writes to the Galatians, "if we, or an angel from heaven, preach **any other gospel** to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed."⁹⁹

⁹³ Colossians 2:13–14 NAS.

⁹⁴ Matthew 5: 17–48.

⁹⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:14.

⁹⁶ Isaiah 58:5–10.

⁹⁷ Luke 13:24.

⁹⁸ Matthew 7:13, 14.

⁹⁹ Galatians 1:8.

And to the Thessalonians, “it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, *and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”¹⁰⁰

We prove we believe in Jesus when we follow His teachings, even as Abraham proved his faith in God “when he offered Isaac his son on the altar.”¹⁰¹

There were some believers in the time of the Apostles who became confused by Paul’s writings, and began to think they only needed to believe “in their hearts” to be saved. They thought anything more than “faith alone” was salvation “by works” and not “by grace through faith.”¹⁰² They believed they did not have to prepare themselves for the Lord’s return,¹⁰³ and that grace would cover all their sins.

The Apostle Peter said of these people:

“Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider *that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*”¹⁰⁴

God gives the Holy Spirit “to those who obey Him.”¹⁰⁵

Only those who are obedient to Christ receive the Spirit of Christ. And “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.”¹⁰⁶

Or were we saved by our faith alone? Thanks be to God, no. But rather the love of Christ turned our hearts to repentance, and made us obey righteousness.

“We love Him because He first loved us.”¹⁰⁷

In the next section, we will talk more about God’s wonderful gift, Jesus’ promise to all who love Him and keep His commandments.

¹⁰⁰ Thessalonians 1:8.

¹⁰¹ James 2:21.

¹⁰² Ephesians 2:8, 9.

¹⁰³ Matthew 24:36–51; 25:1–29.

¹⁰⁴ 2 Peter 3:13–16.

¹⁰⁵ Acts 5:32; John 14: 15–16, 23.

¹⁰⁶ Romans 8:9.

¹⁰⁷ 1 John 4:19.

I Am the
Life

“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection . . .”

Hebrews 6:1

When we talk about going on to perfection in Christ, we can talk about many things. Every believer in his path to maturity must diligently study the words of Christ and receive instruction and edification in His Church, regarding all matters of life and godliness.¹⁰⁸

But here we want to discuss three blessings Christ gave us, the Holy Spirit, the remembrance of His death, and His commandment that we love one another. Through our daily devotion to these, we receive the power of God, the love of God we need to walk in the heavenly path. God’s love is the power that changes us into the image of Christ.

The promised Comforter

The gift of the Holy Spirit – Christ living in us

To become like Christ is something no man can do, which is why we need the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the promise Jesus made to His disciples in the night when He was betrayed:

“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . . I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in the Father, and you in Me, and I in you . . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.”¹⁰⁹

The experience of prayer in the Spirit

First of all, we can describe it as a tremendous comfort. The Holy Spirit is described as the Comforter. Peter says, “now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” Others describe the Spirit as “living water.” Jesus says, “out of their bellies will flow rivers of living water.” And this is a very good description of praying in the Holy Spirit.

We should also say there is a reverent feeling when praying in the Spirit, simply because the presence of God is felt inside the believer. Paul comforts the believers with these words, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out ‘Abba Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.”¹¹⁰

Some people when they hear about praying in tongues think about the sound of “praying in tongues.” But the greatest benefit of praying in the Spirit is being filled with the Spirit. As prayer continues, the believer becomes more and more filled with the Spirit, his mind is given tremendous peace, and he is spiritually joyful or comforted.

¹⁰⁸ 2 Peter 1:3

¹⁰⁹ John 14:2, 18–20, 13.

¹¹⁰ Romans 8:14–16.

“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, **unless** you abide in Me . . . If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and **throw them into the fire, and they are burned.**”

John 15:4, 6

We must abide in Him, in the Spirit, to bear fruit. “. . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”¹¹¹

Through the Spirit we bear fruit, without which we cannot please God, and this is not the fruit of human effort of which anyone can boast.

We see the life of believers not having the Spirit; it is a human effort of religion. Paul describes men in the last days as “having a form of godliness but denying its power,”¹¹² and this is sad, that some serve Christ without the Comforter. Without the Spirit, we can do nothing but our own works; with the Spirit, we have a partner, a counselor, and a friend. And so in these last days, those who have received the grace of God need to share with all, the worship of God in Spirit and truth.

Keeping ourselves filled with the Spirit

We maintain our fullness of the Spirit through prayer in the Spirit, and communion with God. The Apostle Jude writes, “praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God.”¹¹³

But prayer is not the only way we keep ourselves filled with the Holy Spirit. We can also sing spiritual songs to one another. Paul writes, “be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”¹¹⁴

Any ministry we have to another is a way we can keep ourselves filled with the Spirit, because we know the Spirit is also given for the edification of the Church: “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.”¹¹⁵

Of course, to be filled with the Spirit, we also need to read the scriptures, especially the words of Christ. Jesus says, “the words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.”¹¹⁶ Being filled with the word of God is another way we can be filled with the Spirit.

And we need to confess our sins to God and to one another, so that we will give no opportunity for the devil to hinder the work of the Spirit.

¹¹¹ Galatians 5:22, 23.

¹¹² 2 Timothy 3:5.

¹¹³ Jude 20, 21; Ephesians 6:18.

¹¹⁴ Ephesians 5:18, 19.

¹¹⁵ I Corinthians 12:7–10.

¹¹⁶ John 6:63.

Remember My death

“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. **Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life,** and I will raise him up at the last day.”

John 6:53–54

Just as prayer in the Holy Spirit keeps us in the love of God, so the remembrance of Christ’s death also keeps us in the love of God. Through the remembrance of His death, we are constantly reminded of His love for us. So whether we are being reminded of Christ’s sacrifice or being filled by the Spirit, we are continually being compelled by God’s love.¹¹⁷

The breaking of bread is a very significant act we do. We see in the time of the Apostles,¹¹⁸ and even today, many sleep because they do not properly discern the body of Christ. Jesus tells us, “this is My body, which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”¹¹⁹ It is not symbolic, but rather once we give thanks, the bread is spiritually transformed into Christ’s body. And this is why it contains life. When we partake of the body of Christ, we follow the example of Christ, and the Apostles, taking one loaf of unleavened bread. Just as Christ has one body, we partake of one loaf of the “unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”¹²⁰ The unleavened bread is our symbol of sincerity and commitment to maintaining

the purity of the faith that Christ has entrusted to us.

We must remember Christ’s sacrifice in this way as often as possible until He returns. Through Christ’s power, we become like Christ who gave His life for the salvation of others.

Love one another

On the night Jesus was betrayed, He instructed the disciples in the washing of feet, the Lord’s supper, and the promised Holy Spirit. Finally, He gave His disciples one more commandment:

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.”¹²¹

Jesus’ last commandment to His Church is to “love one another.” The final act of Jesus’ life as a man is to give His life for His friends, and so He sets the example of love for the Church and every man. Even as Christ gave His life for the Church, this is the kind of love His disciples should have for one another.

“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.”¹²²

It is through the Spirit that we learn to love one another. From God’s love, we love others. Paul writes, “Concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.”¹²³

“Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”¹²⁴

Love “rejoices in the truth.”¹²⁵ Without love and the leading of the Holy Spirit, the unity Jesus prayed for will never happen.

Until we are all persuaded, we must respect the faith and conscience of the one who observes elements of his faith in conscience to God. “For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats

¹¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:14.

¹¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:29, 30.

¹¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:24.

¹²⁰ 1 Corinthians 5:8, 10:16–17.

¹²¹ John 15:12–14.

¹²² 1 John 4:16.

¹²³ 1 Thessalonians 4:9.

¹²⁴ Ephesians 4:3, 4.

¹²⁵ 1 Corinthians 13:6.

despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant?"¹²⁶

We should never allow our spiritual understanding to become a reason for boasting. God gives us understanding only that we may be saved and know Him more deeply. Paul again writes, "We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know."¹²⁷

Created for good works

"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."¹²⁸

Having begun in Christ, we carry on to perfection, putting on good works, bearing love, the fruit of the Spirit; preparing ourselves for the marriage supper of the Lamb, the beginning of our eternal life with Christ!

Even with complete doctrine, if we have no works, our faith is meaningless.¹²⁹

The Apostle Paul writes,

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."¹³⁰

Jesus tells us we must let our light shine so that all men will glorify our Father in Heaven.¹³¹ And this is how we complete our path in the imitation of Christ, who went around doing good,¹³² and brought glory to His heavenly Father.¹³³

"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, and of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."¹³⁴

We run as wanting to receive the prize.

"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work . . . Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."¹³⁵

¹²⁶ Romans 14:3, 4.

¹²⁷ I Corinthians 8:1, 2.

¹²⁸ Revelation 19:7, 8.

¹²⁹ James 2:19–26.

¹³⁰ Ephesians 2:10.

¹³¹ Matthew 5: 13–16; 1 Peter 2:12.

¹³² Acts 10:38.

¹³³ Matthew 9:8; 15:31; Mark 2:12.

¹³⁴ I Corinthians 3:11–15.

¹³⁵ Revelation 22:12, 20, 21.

The Gospel of
Jesus Christ

7. “The Son can do nothing of Himself, **unless** it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner . . . **as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.**”
- John 5:19–20 NASB
- As sons of God, we must imitate Christ. We begin with His baptism.*
8. “**Unless** one is (born again) born of water and the Spirit, **he cannot enter the kingdom of God.**”
- John 3:3, 5
- We must be united with Jesus in His baptism.*
9. “**Unless** I wash you, **you have no part with Me.**”
- John 13:8 NIV
- We must allow Christ, the body of Christ, to wash our feet.*
10. “**Unless** you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. **Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life**, and I will raise him up at the last day.”
- John 6:53–54
- We must remember His death.*
11. “So My heavenly Father will also **(deliver you to the torturers) unless** each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”
- Matthew 18:34-35
- We must forgive one another as Christ forgave us.*
12. “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, **unless** you abide in Me . . . If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as
- We must abide in the Spirit and body of Christ (His Church).*

a branch and is withered; and they gather them and **throw them into the fire, and they are burned.**"

John 15:4, 6

Unless you believe that I am

The teaching we haven't mentioned is:

"Unless you believe that I am, you will die in your sins."

John 8:24
NASB adds *He*

Because this teaching uses a different expression for "unless," "ean gar me," ("if for no"). And it has to do with the identity of Jesus, "Who are You?"¹³⁶

The meaning of "I am"

"And when He said to them "I am," **they drew back and fell to the ground.**" John 18:6; NKJV adds *He*

John 8:24 is only one of **seven passages** in the Gospel of John, where Jesus refers to Himself as "I am." Jesus also refers to Himself as "I am" in John 8:28, 58; 13:19, and 18:5, 6 and 8.

Many translations choose to add words to the original Greek text, for example: I am *He*, or I am *the one that I say I am*. But is Jesus really saying "I am *He*?" or is He saying "I am?"

In John 8:58, Jesus absolutely clarifies the meaning of "I am."

"Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.' **Then they took up stones to throw at Him;** but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by."

Jesus was not just saying that He existed before Abraham. He was claiming to be the image of God who appeared to Moses. Let us read the account of God first appearing to Moses:

"Then Moses said to God, 'Indeed, *when* I come to the children of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they say to me, "**What is His name?**" What shall I say to them?' And God said to Moses, 'I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE.' And He said, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, '**I WILL BE**' has sent me to you.'" Moreover, God said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: "He WILL BE (YHVH), the ELOHIM of your fathers has sent me to you.'" ¹³⁷

Jesus Christ is the image of the one true God, "WHO IS, and, WHO WAS, and WHO IS TO COME" ¹³⁸

¹³⁶ John 8:25.

¹³⁷ Exodus 3:13–15, substituting I AM WHO I AM, with the grammar of the Hebrew Text

¹³⁸ Revelation 1:8.

Jesus is the image and name of the one true God

The Apostle John wrote, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”¹³⁹

The Apostle Paul tells us, “He is the image of the invisible God.”¹⁴⁰

John and Paul tell us, “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”¹⁴¹

And so Isaiah tells us that Jesus is also the name of God:

“For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”¹⁴²

The Bible teaches us that Jesus is the image, and name of the unseen God.

To believe in the true God is to have eternal life

So why does this salvation teaching, “**Unless** you believe that I am,” use a different expression for “unless” than the other ten? Why does it stand alone?

It is only through Jesus’ teachings of the kingdom of heaven that we come to know, and believe in, “the only true God.”

To know and **believe in** the one true God is eternal life.

Jesus prayed this way:

“**And this is eternal life**, that they may **know You**, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”¹⁴³

And so Jesus told Nicodemus:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever **believes in Him** should not perish but have everlasting life . . .”

Jesus explains the condemnation, “if for no”

Jesus continues explaining to Nicodemus:

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. **And this is the condemnation**, that the light has come into the world, and men

¹³⁹ John 1:18.

¹⁴⁰ Colossians 1:15.

¹⁴¹ John 1:3; Colossians 1:16.

¹⁴² Isaiah 9:6.

¹⁴³ John 17:3.

loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. **But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen**, that they have been done in God.”¹⁴⁴

*God is love*¹⁴⁵

The Apostle Paul also tells us that men are without excuse because they failed to recognize the true God:

“For since the creation of the world **His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made**, even His eternal power and Godhead, **so that they are without excuse**, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.”¹⁴⁶

Jesus told the Pharisees they would recognize Him as the image of the true God on the cross:

“When you lift up the Son of Man, **then you will know that ‘I am,’** and *that* I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.”¹⁴⁷

And you can believe that today “Jesus is” the image of the one true God; through whom the invisible God speaks.

“Thus says the LORD, **the King of Israel and Redeemer**, the LORD of hosts:
‘I *am* the First and I *am* the Last;
Besides Me *there is* no God.”¹⁴⁸

“I am the First and the Last. **I am He who lives, and was dead**, and behold, I am alive forevermore.”¹⁴⁹

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, *he who is* not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know *My sheep*, and am known by *My own*. As the Father knows Me, even so, I know the Father; and I lay down *My life* for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear *My voice*; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd.

John 10: 11–16

¹⁴⁴ John 3:16–21.

¹⁴⁵ 1 John 4:16.

¹⁴⁶ Romans 1:20–23.

¹⁴⁷ John 8:28.

¹⁴⁸ Isaiah 44:6.

¹⁴⁹ Revelation 1:17–18.

