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A MESSAGE FOR OUR EVANGELICAL FRIENDS CHRIST'S RESTORED GOSPEL

Who is Jesus?

Jesus is God, the Lord Omnipotent, the Creator, who took on human form to die for us, to atone for your sins and mine (Colossians 1:14-18). He lived a sinless life to provide an example of how we should live. He died. He was buried and was bodily resurrected to point the way to eternal life (I Corinthians 15:1-4). He loves you and has a plan for your life.

Jesus was not a man who became God, but He has always been God. He was not created, but existed in eternity long before He came to earth and took on a physical body (John 8:58).

Because He is God, Jesus is eternal and not subject to limitations of time and space as we are. He knows all things including every detail of your life. He has all power including the ability to bring healing and peace to your soul (Ephesians 2:14-18). It is because He first loved us that we want to share the message of His gospel with you.

How Can I Be Saved?

Did you know that you can have an assurance of salvation to know that you will live with God in eternity (Hebrews 11:1)? God tells us how that is done in His gospel -- the good news of salvation (Romans 1:16-17). There are many different gospels and denominations in evangelical Christianity, but there is only one way to be saved -- that is by the gospel of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:6-8).

Christ's gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ interceded for us and received the punishment for our sins instead of us (Romans 5:9-11). He calls us to believe, repent and surrender to Him as Lord. He calls us to walk in obedience to Him. He wants to be more than Savior; He wants to be Lord and Master in your life (Acts 2:36).

It is only by His mercy and by His grace that any person can have a true assurance of salvation -- by grace alone, through Christ alone.

A Personal Relationship with the Lord through Prayer

You can have a personal and intimate relationship with God who is not silent, but who speaks to man in this day and age. However that relationship doesn't come by accepting Him, but by surrendering to Him.

A personal relationship with God is obtained and enhanced by faithful and earnest prayer. The Bible instructs us to pray to the Father (Matthew 6:6-13). This is the channel by which we can communicate with God and receive His grace.

We often think that God doesn't care if we pray to Jesus or the Father, but if God has given us a command, shouldn't we, because we love Him, want to obey? How can we expect an intimate relationship with our Creator if we ignore His commands?

A True Assurance of Salvation

"Broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction and many there be which go in there at (Matthew 7:13)." Some of our well meaning evangelical friends have a false assurance of salvation thinking that a momentary recognition of Christ gives them a license to do what they want (i.e. often called easy believism, what theologians call antinomianism). Even Protestant ministers have been aware that many of their own teachers serve up a cheapened gospel that gives a false assurance of salvation:

We Lutherans have gathered like ravens round the carcass of cheap grace, and there we have drunk of the poison which has killed the life of following Christ.... But do we realize that this cheap grace has turned back upon us like a boomerang? The price we are having to pay today in the shape of the collapse of the organized church is only the inevitable consequence of our policy of making grace available to all at too low a cost. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* as quoted in *Christian History*, Vol. X, No. 4, pp. 28-29)

I John 3:9 tells us that the believer will not continue in a pattern of deliberate sin. This means that, if we are true believers, there will always be a change in the way we live our lives.

You can have a *true* assurance of salvation -- to know that you have been redeemed by the atoning sacrifice of Christ's blood for you. However, a *true* assurance can never be obtained without committing your life fully and completely to Him. A saving faith is an active faith that bears fruit. There must be a change in the pattern of sin that you live in your life.

A Saving Faith

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Hebrews 11:6

A saving faith is one that will trust wholly and completely in the merits of Christ's shed blood to save them (Hebrews 9:12). It is 100% by Christ alone and 100% by His grace alone that you can be saved (Romans 3:23-24).

Anyone who possesses this kind of faith recognizes their own sinful condition, understands that Christ alone saves, and they also have the assurance that Christ's atonement applies to them personally.

But a saving faith is also an active faith. For the true believer, there is always a change in the pattern of sin. Faith that does not bear fruit is a dead faith and cannot save (James 2:17).

The fact is that faith "alone" will not save unless it is the kind of faith that Paul talked about in Galatians 5:6 -- faith expressing itself through love. Anything short of this dilutes the meaning of faith.

Why must I repent?

Many of our friends ask, "If I am saved by faith alone, isn't that enough? Do I really need to repent of my sins?" Instead of preaching repentance, many evangelical teachers have mistakenly given their followers the idea that the Lord should meekly wait for them to "accept" Him. The evangelical message is often a gospel of acceptance rather than repentance.

There are many verses to indicate that we are saved by faith, but faith "alone" is not enough (Romans 2:4). Anyone who truly believes will also repent of their sins (Acts 2:36-38).

Evangelicals have a variety of opinions about repentance. Some maintain that repentance is simply "a change of mind about who Christ is." But this dilutes the meaning of repentance and makes it sound like the same thing as faith. It is not. Repentance is an entirely different and necessary element of Christ's gospel that must occur to have a true assurance of salvation (Acts 3:19; 11:18). Faith "alone" is not enough.

Repentance involves a change in the pattern of sin (Isaiah 1:16-17, Ezekiel 18:30, Acts 3:19 & 26, Luke 3:8). I am a sinner (Romans 3:23). When I recognize that fact, I not only believe in Jesus Christ, but by His grace, I make a commitment to live my life differently (I John 3:9). Christ calls you to truly repent of your sins.

Surrender versus Acceptance

For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. Jude 1:4 (NIV)

There are many sincere, yet misguided evangelical teachers who believe that there are two classes of Christians: "spiritual" and "carnal." They mistakenly believe that it is possible to "accept" Christ as Savior while simultaneously continuing a lifestyle of rebellion, unwilling to walk in obedience to our Lord, and still be saved (i.e. "carnal" Christians).

They use passages such as I Corinthians 2:14 - 3:3 as a proof text to justify their theory that there are two classes of Christians. However, the Apostle Paul was not referring to two classes of Christians. He was talking about

1) those who were truly born again and 2) those who had a false assurance of salvation.

In Christ's gospel, there isn't a two-step process where I accept Jesus as Savior, and then sometime later I *might* be willing to obey Him. Those who possess a true, saving faith are drawn by His grace to submit to Christ as Lord when they are first saved (Acts 2:36). If one is truly saved, he has determined to follow Christ as Lord, or he was never truly saved in the first place.

God is not beholden to us, waiting on us to "accept" Him. Rather He calls us to cease our rebellion, to submit to His will, to commit ourselves in loving service to Him. We were created by Him, and we have all sinned and fallen short (Romans 3:23). It is He who must accept us. Only if we are *willing to obey* Him can we expect His forgiveness.

Are you one who has been misled by a gospel that provides a false assurance of salvation? Was your conversion based on "acceptance" or surrender? Will God simply wink at the immorality in your life without genuine faith, sincere repentance and surrender to Him? There is hope in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.

What do you mean when you say a person is saved by grace alone?

The concept of grace comes from the Greek word *charis*, which means *God's divine influence upon our hearts and its reflection in the life*. It is God's grace that causes us to recognize we are sinners, to realize that we are dependent on Him for any hope of salvation, that causes us to believe and repent (Romans 2:4). Grace is God moving in the life of the believer to bring us to Him (John 6:44).

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Philippians 2:13

Every gift that we receive comes from Him (Ephesians 1:3). Every skill or ability is from Him.

Everything that we possess comes from a loving and all-powerful God who showers His blessings on rebellious and repentant sinners according to His will and design (Matthew 5:45).

You may not believe it, but God has been with you throughout your life, every step of the way. He has mercifully granted you many blessings that you are not even aware of (I Corinthians 1:3-4). This is God's grace. By His grace, you are given a conscience to know right from wrong (Romans 2:15). By His grace, He plants a remorse for sin in your heart. By His grace, He causes you to repent and surrender to Him (Romans 2:4).

Think back on your life. Did you ever do something that you thought was good? You couldn't have done that good thing if it weren't for God's grace motivating you and calling you. It was His grace that worked in your life at that time. It is His grace that constantly impacts our lives in ways that we are often not aware of. Grace is *the desire and power to do God's will*.

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. I Corinthians 15:10

It is also God's grace that causes us to obey. For example, water baptism is a work of God that He performs in the life of the believer. He is the One who plants the desire for baptism in our hearts, and He is the One who gives us the power to be baptized. Such a deed is an act of God, not man. That is why God receives 100% of the credit whenever He does something good in your life. It is His grace working in you (II Corinthians 6:1).

Not of works

Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. John 6:28-29

It is true that we are not saved by any work that *man* performs. Salvation is an act of *God* that *He* performs in the life of each believer by His grace. Salvation is a gift of God that *He* grants to us by His mercy (Romans 5:18). There is no work that *we* can perform to *earn* that gift of salvation (Ephesians 2:9).

When we first believe, that is an act of God's grace. When we repent and surrender to Him, that is an act of God's grace. Baptisms of water and the Holy Spirit are acts of God's grace as well. The Ephesian letter says that these are not works of man, but of God, and that therefore no man can boast about these things.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8-10

We are saved by faith -- faith expressed in acts of love (Galatians 5:6). Because everything good has its source in God, we are not saved by anything that *we* do but by the marvelous *acts of God* that He performs in our lives.

What Did Jesus Say Was Necessary to Enter the Kingdom?

Who was the greatest theologian of all time? It was Jesus Christ. How did He say that you could enter the kingdom of God and have eternal life with Him?

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth* the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Matthew 7:20-21

Obviously, any good thing that you do is actually God's grace operating in your life. Christ was saying that, in order to enter the kingdom, you must allow His grace to bear the fruit of obedience in your life. But isn't this contrary to the "faith alone" gospel that many evangelical pastors teach? And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God: *but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments*. Matthew 19:16-17

The rich, young ruler asked how to obtain eternal life. Jesus answered, "keep the commandments." Christ did not say, "Be *willing* to obey." He said "*obey*." Many evangelical teachers would call this

"cultic" teaching, but how can we ignore the words of Christ? How do we explain these two passages from the greatest theologian in history?

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me..... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not..... And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. Matthew 25:34-36, 41-43 & 46

Obedience will be a criterion for judgment. This is not just a criterion for judging non-believers. Nothing in this passage suggests that believers will be given a free pass to escape this judgment. If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Hebrews 10:26 (NIV)

A just God will judge each person based on how they have individually responded and will apply the same standard to all people. What is the criterion that Christ said He would use? Obedience.

What is Water Baptism?

Baptism is a form of obedience that Christ requires of every believer (John 3:5). Unless you have exercised genuine faith, repentance and surrender to Christ, baptism is a meaningless exercise. You would just be a wet sinner, and it means nothing. True baptism means that you must believe, repent and surrender, that you must give your life totally and unremittingly in service to Him. Every true believer, when given the opportunity, will be baptized. It is not a perfunctory ritual that is performed *after* salvation, but it is *part of* salvation (Acts 22:16). I Peter 3:21 says that "baptism doth also now save us." That is why Jesus said that believers must be "born of water" to enter the kingdom:

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be *born of water* and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. John 3:3-5

What does "born of water" mean in this passage? Is it talking about the bag of waters that was broken when we were originally born in our mothers' wombs? No, Nicodemus said, "when he is old." Jesus did not correct Nicodemus on this point.

Some people actually believe that "born of water" refers to the water that broke at our original birth. But if we accept this idea, we are saying that a work must be performed (i.e. water breaking at birth) in order for us to be saved. That would not be a "faith alone" gospel. Salvation has nothing to do with water breaking when we are originally born.

Some well meaning Evangelicals say that "born of water" refers to Ephesians 5:26 or "the washing of water by the word." However, this phrase refers to the *sanctification* of Christ's church, those who have *already* been converted. In talking about being "born of water," Jesus was not referring to Ephesians 5:26 which was written much later.

The fact is that being born of water involves exercising faith, repenting of our sins and surrendering to Christ as Lord. Without these there is no baptism, and being born again is impossible.

Through the restored gospel of Christ, you can know what it means to truly be born again and enter into a covenant relationship with Jesus Christ. But true baptism must involve the following:

- 1) A covenant relationship in which you will serve Him and be willing to obey Him (Matthew 28:19-20).
- 2) A remission of your sins (Acts 22:16; I Peter 3:21; Mark 16:16).
- 3) Entrance into Christ's church (Acts 2:41; I Corinthians 12:13).

Have you considered the impact of this message on your life? Perhaps you have been baptized. Was the commitment you made based on "acceptance" of Him? Was obedience merely an option? Was your repentance merely a change of mind? Did you truly experience an abrupt and lasting change in your pattern of sin? You can find victory and renewed hope in Christ through His restored gospel.

How and when is one born of the Spirit of God?

The gift of the Holy Spirit is simply a degree of God's Spirit by which He indwells believers who have made a covenant to obey Him. Saying that you "accept" Christ is not enough. Before you can receive this gift, you must have a faith that bears fruit, repentance that is more than a change of mind, and a willingness to obey.

Does the gift of the Holy Spirit precede or follow water baptism? The pattern that Christ established would indicate that it is entirely appropriate for water baptism to precede the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Matthew 3: 13-17

When Peter preached the gospel on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:36 tells us that the people were "pricked in their heart [s]." They believed the gospel but had not yet received that degree of God's Spirit called the "gift of the Holy Ghost." Why? Because faith "alone" is not enough. The believer must also repent of his or her sins (Acts 3:19). Remember that repentance is necessary for salvation.

Now when they heard this, they were *pricked in their heart*, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye *shall* receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Acts 2:36-38

In Acts 8, believers at Samaria had been baptized in water but had not yet received the gift of the Holy Ghost. As we mentioned earlier, being born of water could not occur unless faith, repentance and surrender were clearly evident. Despite this, they had still not received the gift of the Holy Ghost:

But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women..... Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. Acts 8: 12-17

How could this be? This seems to contradict everything that evangelical ministers teach? Isn't the indwelling of the Holy Spirit *always* granted to people when they first believe? Why didn't this occur in Samaria? Because it is possible for the gift of the Holy Spirit to be granted sometime *after* initial belief.

Theologians argue about whether it was more "normative" in the New Testament church to receive this gift at the point of initial belief or by laying on hands. Because this is intended to be a short explanation, we merely want to establish that the gift of the Holy Ghost can occur at a different

time from initial belief and that laying on hands is a legitimate means by which God conveys that gift (I Timothy 4:14; II Timothy 1:6). We should find this pattern wherever Christ's true church exists.

Endure to the End vs. Once Saved/ Always Saved

It is common for our evangelical friends to use biblical passages like Ephesians 1:12-14 and John 10:27-30 as proof texts to prop up the idea that we can never fall from a saved condition. This is commonly referred to as a "once saved/always saved" perspective. Theologians call it the doctrine of "perseverance" or "eternal security."

Ephesians 1 says that true believers are "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" and that it is "the earnest of our inheritance." John 10 says, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."

The above two passages contain marvelous promises and are absolutely true, but we cannot simply isolate scriptures that we want and ignore the rest. Scripture interprets scripture, and these promises must be understood in light of the entire context of the Bible. Following are just two of several verses applying to this subject that many Evangelicals are reluctant to discuss:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. Hebrews 6:4-6

For if they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. II Peter 2:20-22

So what is the meaning of the above four passages? Ephesians 1 tells us that when we surrender to Christ as Lord, we are marked with the seal of His Holy Spirit, an evidence of the promise of eternal life.

John 10 gives believers a marvelous promise of eternal life saying, "no one can snatch them out of my hand." In other words, no other human being can determine your eternal destiny. Once God has granted you eternal life, it is only by exercising your free will to reject the gospel that you could be lost. Each person will be judged according to their own individual response to Christ's gospel.

Hebrews 6 makes it clear that people have the agency to choose. Unfortunately, even after they have been "partakers of the Holy Ghost," it is possible for them to "fall away" and reject the gospel. II Peter warns us that those who have had the "knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" can be "overcome." Peter goes on to say, "the latter end is worse with them than the beginning."

But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and he becometh unfruitful. Matthew 13:20-22

On at least two occasions, Jesus, our Lord, promised eternal life to those who endure to the end: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. Matthew 10:22

But he that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved. Matthew 24:13

Once you have found that pearl of great price, that precious gospel, Jesus calls you to "endure to the end" and to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). You may ask, "How do you have an assurance of salvation if you believe one can fall from grace?" I have absolute assurance by the power of God's Holy Spirit and His promises implicit in scripture that if I died today, He would accept me into His kingdom. There is no doubt in my mind. I would have to openly reject Christ's gospel in order to jeopardize my salvation in any way. I have not done that. I trust in the promises of Christ, my Savior and Lord.

In light of passages like Hebrews 6 and II Peter 2, are you concerned about evangelical churches that offer false guarantees of salvation? The idea of enduring to the end is a vital element of Christ's gospel. Please do not be deceived by a gospel of "acceptance." Once you have found that precious gospel, you must faithfully endure to the end.

Is it enough to barely make it into heaven? Is it possible to be saved and still have an eternity of regret for things that I did not do for my Lord?

Does our behavior really make any difference if we know that we've been saved and are eternally secure: You bet it does. Are there any eternal consequences in the life of a believer who sins after they are saved? Yes, there are. Will everybody in heaven be able to experience the same blessings and the same reward. No, they will not..... The Bible nowhere indicates that all of us are going to have the same *position* in heaven.... Secondly, nowhere does it indicate that everybody is going to have the same *privileges* in heaven. Nor does it indicate that everybody is going to be able to enjoy heaven to the same degree..... Is it possible to be eternally secure and yet to be an eternal loser? You bet it is.... Can you imagine standing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ -- who stretched out both arms on the cross, and they drove a spike in both hands, they put a crown of thorns on His head, and the blood ran down in His eyes and down His chest, and He did all of that for one reason: that you and I could be forgiven of our sins, and live happily and joyfully in this life and one of these days die and go to heaven -- can you imagine standing in His presence and saying, "All I care about's just getting in"?

Charles Stanley *Eternal Security: What Do We Have to Lose?* In Touch Ministries

It is wonderful to see that some evangelical teachers are beginning to combat the mentality of "just barely making it into heaven and doing nothing for our Lord." But did you know that Christ's restored church has been teaching that principle for over 150 years? There will definitely be an eternity of regret for those who just want to be saved and do nothing on this earth for their Heavenly Father.

Are there degrees of reward for believers? Are there different heavens or glories in God's kingdom?

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. John 14:2

Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a *full* reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath *both the Father and the Son*. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. II John 1:8-10

There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. I Corinthians 15:41-

I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. II Corinthians 12:2

From a simple reading of the above passages, it is readily apparent that there are degrees of reward for believers. Our primary motivation for doing good works should always be our love for the Master, but it is comforting to know that He is a just God who will exercise judgment in an equitable manner.

What a wonderful thought that the Lord is preparing a special place in His kingdom just for you -- one uniquely prepared according to your individual response. In II John, by inference, if there is such a thing as a "full" reward, it is entirely possible that there are rewards that are *less* than full. True believers will be saved from hell, but I Corinthians 15 and II Corinthians 12 make it clear that there are various heavens and glories in God's kingdom (Ephesians 4:10).

Will people who have never heard Christ's gospel be damned to hell?

Is it possible that a just God could damn souls for eternity who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ? How could this be? Most well meaning evangelical teachers believe that this is the case. Most evangelical teachers maintain that someone who has been isolated in the jungle all of his life, never having heard the gospel of Christ, will be damned to hell.

Since without the gospel we were all destined for hell, they believe the fact that God saves anyone at all indicates that He is merciful. But would a just God eternally damn souls to hell if they never had an opportunity to hear Christ's gospel? The argument goes:

"They are given the light of creation (Romans 1:20) and the light of their own conscience (Romans 2:15). If that is not enough to bring them in contact with the gospel of Christ, then they must suffer eternal punishment."

But there is always the nagging question that Evangelicals seem to wrestle with: "What does God do with babies who never understood, people with severe mental disabilities who were never able to comprehend, and souls isolated in the most remote places on earth?" Will a God who is just and loving condemn them to an eternity of punishment? The following scriptures offer some insight on this subject:

But he that *knew* not and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. Luke 12:48

Therefore to him that *knoweth* to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin. James 4:17

... for *where no law is*, there is no transgression. Romans 4:15

But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Romans 5:13

[Paul] Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, *because I did it ignorantly* in unbelief. I Timothy 1:13

It is true that we have all sinned (Romans 3:23). The idea that God, by His grace, would stoop to save anyone is a merciful act that none of us earns or deserves. However the above passages make it clear that every person must have an opportunity to hear Christ's gospel before they can be condemned to hell.

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?.... So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Romans 10:14 & 17

Each person is given the light of creation and their own conscience. However there is nothing in scripture that positively states souls will be lost simply because they have never heard the gospel of

Christ. A just God would give every person an opportunity to hear the gospel message. The idea that those who have not had that opportunity will be damned to hell for eternity is a theory and presumption that does not reflect the actions of a God who is loving and just.

Does predestination or human free will play a greater role in my salvation?

The issue here is not "predestination versus free will" as if we had to choose one or the other, but to what degree each plays a role in saving souls.

God, at the beginning, looked down the corridor of time and saw the decisions that we would make to accept or reject His message. He foreknew everything that would ever happen (I Peter 1:2). And the Bible tells us that He established our eternal destiny at that time (Ephesians 1:3-5). God decided our eternal destiny before we ever came to this earth. So in that sense, we are predestined.

The question is, "What criteria did He use to make that decision?" Did the choices that He knew we would make in this life have any bearing on His decision to save us? We believe that anyone who bases their response on the Bible would have to answer "yes" (Joshua 24:15). The choices that we make for the kingdom of Christ definitely affect our eternal destiny.

No one who believes in the Bible can deny that human free will clearly has a bearing on our salvation (Matthew 23:37). Obviously we cannot even respond to the gospel without His grace. However, even though God is sovereign, He does not capriciously and arbitrarily decide that some are saved and some are damned (Acts 10:34).

A just and loving God will give people an opportunity to decide whether to accept or reject His gospel. Each person is given agency, free will to make a decision for or against. If they will respond and surrender to Him, they can know the peace of eternal life with Him.

Your response to the gospel of the kingdom and allowing God's grace to operate in your life definitely does have a bearing on your eternal destiny. You need to make a commitment that is lasting and true, and you can find eternal peace with Christ through His restored gospel.

Modern-day Spiritual Gifts

Is God a God of miracles just as He was in the Bible? Does He really speak to man in this day? Does He still use the gifts of the Spirit to touch the lives of believers? Can you enjoy those same gifts in your life? The answers to the above questions are "yes, yes, yes and yes."

We serve a powerful God who is making His power known to people every day, but you must choose, by His grace, to arise from the lethargy of a "faith alone" gospel and go directly to God for direction. We strongly affirm what theologians call "the perpetuity of spiritual gifts" -- the idea that God, in this day and age, continues to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit to minister to believers.

We believe that God uses the gift of tongues in this day, but we do not believe that people must speak in tongues as a demonstration that they have been born again:

Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? *do all speak with tongues?* do all interpret? I Corinthians 12:29

The answer to all of the above questions would obviously be "no." The Apostle Paul makes a rhetorical point that not everyone is given the above gifts.

In evangelical churches, individual personalities have often replaced scripture as the primary influence in seeking direction. Some well meaning Evangelicals would rather ask their pastor instead of asking God and studying His word.

As a result, many evangelical churches have been deluged by emotional phenomena like the "slain in the Spirit" movement. Others have wandered into the "word-faith" movement which offers a

misleading promise of health, wealth and prosperity -- a kind of "name it/claim it" approach which has no foundation in scripture.

The gifts of the Spirit definitely continue in this day and are available to you through the gospel of Jesus Christ. But you must ask God for direction in this area and test the "gifts" that you receive by scripture.

Jesus came to preach the gospel of an earthly kingdom, that born again believers might be able to experience righteousness, joy and peace here on earth.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:10

Once you have obtained a true assurance of salvation, once you have experienced the joy of a right relationship with the Master and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, simply being saved is not enough. You must allow His grace to operate in your life and prepare you for service to others (John 15:13). Salvation changes your position in Christ, but practically speaking you are still a sinner. For every true believer, there must be a change in the pattern of sin. Sanctification is a process in which He calls you to become conformed to the image of His Son (Ephesians 4:11-13), and it is also the means by which Christ will establish His earthly kingdom.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. Revelation 21:1-4

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord. Isaiah 2:1-5

Jesus came to preach the gospel of the kingdom (Mark 1:14; Matthew 6:11; Matthew 10:4-6). The gospel contains the message of salvation, but it does not end there. Every new believer, having been justified by God's grace through the atonement of Christ, is then called to be sanctified by His Spirit and prepare himself for active service to others (Romans 12:1-2).

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. Psalm 48:1-2

For the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. Psalm 132:13-16

We live in a marvelous age in which God will soon fulfill many of the prophecies that were made by His servants in times past. Zion, His kingdom, will soon be established in a very tangible way here upon the earth. And there will be no more tears, nor crying, nor pain, nor sorrow. All of these things will pass away. Christ said the kingdom was at hand. That is because this joyous condition is available to those of His people who will join together in submission to His will.

The answer is not found in starting another evangelical church. Listen to His voice. Allow His Spirit to guide you and His grace to sustain you. The kingdom of God is available to those who will obey His will for their lives. Give your heart to Him in full submission to His will. The kingdom is at hand; it is available to you.

THE BIBLE AND MODERN REVELATION

A God Who Speaks Today

Evangelicals are divided on this issue. Some use Hebrews 1:1-2 to say that God does not speak today, that all prophecy and revelation ceased a long time ago. But we cannot find anything in this passage that indicates God is silent.

Some say that God speaks today but that the canon of scripture is closed. They maintain that nothing spoken today could be worthy to be called scripture. They often use Revelation 22:18-19 as a proof text to support their idea of a closed canon of scripture.

However, Revelation 22:18-19 specifically addresses the Book of Revelation only. Its meaning has been twisted to suggest that the entire biblical canon is closed. Deuteronomy 4:2 has a very similar message, yet the canon of scripture did not end at Deuteronomy 4:2.

God does not change. If He spoke in times past, He will speak today. He is available to those who seek Him. There is no evidence that the canon of scripture has been closed.

How does God speak to us?

Norm Geisler and William E. Nix, evangelical theologians, have said that God speaks to us through angels, dreams, visions, miracles, nature, Urim and Thummim, casting lots and by studying other prophetic writings. He sometimes even speaks to us in an audible voice. Geisler and Nix add: No doubt the most *common* method God used was the *inner voice* of the individual's conscience and communion with God. That is probably what is most often meant when the prophets write, "And the word of the Lord came unto me saying...."

Norman L. Geisler and William Nix *A General Introduction to the Bible* Moody Press, Chicago, p. 37 Verbal inspiration (word-for-word dictation) is entirely possible for an omnipotent God, but Geisler and Nix are correct in saying that God more frequently allowed scriptural writers to exercise agency in choosing the exact words to use (Geisler and Nix, p. 55-58). This principle is just as true today as it was for writers of the Bible.

Is the Bible the infallible and inerrant word of God?

Using passages like II Timothy 3:16, Fundamentalists maintain that the original writings of scripture were all plenary (i.e. full, complete, without error) and that the Bible is infallible (i.e. true and reliable in all matters it addresses) and inerrant (i.e. free from falsehood, fraud and deceit).

However, in addressing this issue, many Fundamentalists fail to point out that they are actually talking about the original writings and not the Bible that we hold in our hands today.

In 1978, an International Council on Biblical Inerrancy made up of 300 evangelical scholars composed the Chicago Statement on Scripture. Article X of this statement says, "We further affirm that copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God *to the extent that they faithfully represent the original.*" A man named Joseph Smith, Jr. made a very similar statement 130 years earlier in saying, "We believe the bible [King James Version] to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly."

Neo-evangelicals say that the Bible's purpose is to save, and it is "infallible" only in that it accomplishes that purpose. However, they would say that it is not inerrant in all its statements. So there is division among evangelical Christians about what they mean by "infallibility" and "inerrancy." And many fail to clarify that the Bible we hold in our hands today might have minor factual errors.

In discussing how the original autographs were without error, Norm Geisler and William Nix, say: Or, how did God produce an infallible book through *fallible men*? A frank and forthright answer, yet one often very reluctantly given by biblical scholars, is "We don't know." Several solutions have been suggested for this problem, all of which have their own inherent difficulties In the whole question of the *modus operandi* (mode of operation) of inspiration, a balance must be sought between the two extremes of divine dictation and *human fallibility*.

Norman L. Geisler and William Nix *A General Introduction to the Bible* Moody Press, Chicago, p. 45-47

In other words, even the idea that the original autographs were without error is an assumption that Fundamentalists have created. Instead of balance, the fallibility of human authors is simply ignored making any theories about the original autographs arbitrary and capricious.

As adherents of Christ's restored gospel, we believe that the Bible contains minor factual errors that have no bearing on its veracity regarding the gospel, salvation, sanctification, creation, God's relationship to man, etc. However, regarding such important issues, there are instances where the Bible does not express these concepts in a manner that can be clearly understood by the average reader. As a result, we believe the Bible to be an authoritative standard for faith and practice, but we do not promulgate a belief that the Bible is free from error in every factual detail.

If you adhere to the neo-evangelical definition of "infallibility" (i.e. able to save), then we would certainly agree that the Bible has the ability to bring a person to salvation. As to the original autographs being without error, we could not tell you because we have never seen them. Anything beyond this is speculative, even presumptuous.

The translation [King James Version] was published in 1611 and very rapidly went through several editions, nearly all of which had some changes in the text.... In 1870, the Church of England authorized a revision of the KJV The work was carefully, not to say pedantically, done, and in the NT alone about 30,000 changes were made, over 5,000 of them on the basis of a better Greek text The complete Bible appeared in 1885, with an appendix which listed the changes preferred by the American scholars In 1833 Noah Webster published a complete KJV in which he corrected some 150 words and phrases that were either misleading or wrong Many Bibles and perhaps as many as 250 NTs in English have appeared since 1611

Harper's Bible Dictionary
When fallible human beings are involved, it is difficult to understand how the original autograph for every book of the Bible could be perfect. With all of the changes that have occurred, it is even more difficult to understand how today's Bible could be considered absolutely inerrant in every respect. It is entirely possible for the Bible to contain minor factual errors that do not affect questions of importance (i.e. salvation, creation, sanctification, etc.) and still serve as a source of authority for our lives. We believe that the Bible is the word of God and should serve as an authoritative standard by which we can know the truth and make decisions for our lives, but we do not believe that every word in modern bibles is inerrant or infallible.

Is the Bible materially sufficient?

Does the Bible contain the elements of Christ's gospel necessary for salvation? Absolutely. You can find all of the elements of Christ's gospel in the Bible. The Bible is materially sufficient.

However, it is not always *formally* sufficient -- given in a form that is easy for the average reader to fully comprehend the gospel. Because it contains Christ's gospel, it has the ability to save those whose hearts are open, who ask of God, and who test everything by scripture.

There is tremendous disagreement, even among evangelical pastors, about how people are saved. The elements of Christ's gospel are not always clear to many Christian believers. For instance, many evangelical pastors continue to disagree as to whether faith, repentance and surrender are all necessary for salvation. There is a welter of confusion among evangelical teachers about these issues.

As believers in Christ's restored gospel, we frequently say that "plain and precious truths" were removed from the gospel. Many evangelical leaders immediately assume that we are referring to actual text that was removed from the Bible. That is not always the case. The text can be the same, but the way that the Bible is taught can vary widely from one teacher to another.

When evangelical churches limit the function of interpreting scripture to a single personality or pastor, it is entirely possible for important parts of Christ's gospel to be misinterpreted and in effect removed. For example,

I Peter 3:21 tells us that "baptism doth also now save us." By ignoring this passage, well-meaning evangelical teachers mistakenly maintain that water baptism is unnecessary for salvation. Many evangelical pastors have honestly but mistakenly misled congregations who are depending on their pastors to interpret the Bible. A precious truth has been removed from the many different evangelical gospels that exist.

Though they all work from similar bibles, evangelical teachers have arrived at different conclusions about doctrines of salvation (i.e. what theologians call soteriology). It is the responsibility of the priesthood of all believers to ask God directly for guidance on such issues and test what they receive by scripture. This responsibility cannot be delegated to a single person who interprets for the entire body of Christ.

The Bible is materially sufficient in that the basic elements of Christ's gospel can all be found there, but Christ's gospel is not always stated in a way that is absolutely clear to the majority of Christian believers. As a result, there is a great deal of confusion among Evangelicals about the gospel of Christ.

The Book of Mormon is a second testimony of Jesus Christ that reinforces the truth of Christ's gospel.

The Purpose of the Book of Mormon

.... which is to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off for ever; and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.

Foreword to the Book of Mormon

Saved by grace alone

And remember after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved. II Nephi 7:42

Saved by Christ alone

And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask, if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far, save it were by the word of

Christ, with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. II Nephi 13:27-28

Repent, Be Baptized and Endure to the End

And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they can not be saved in the kingdom of God. And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned. II Nephi 6:48-49

Jesus is Lord and the Source of Salvation

For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven, among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay.... But wo, wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God; for salvation cometh to none such, except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ. Mosiah 1:97 & 108

Call to Discipleship

Wherefore, we would to God that we could persuade all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger, but that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross, and bear the shame of the world; Jacob 1:8

A Strong Moral Code

And now I make an end of speaking unto you concerning this pride. And were it not that I must speak unto you concerning a grosser crime.... This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures: for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son. Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives, and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord. Jacob 2:29-33

Joseph Smith, Jr.'s testimony regarding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

...I had now got my mind satisfied so far as the sectarian world was concerned, that it was not my duty to join with any of them, but continue as I was until further directed; I had found the testimony of James to be true, that a man who lacked wisdom might ask of God, and obtain and not be upbraided. I continued to pursue my common avocations in life until the twenty first of September, one thousand eight hundred and twenty three, all the time suffering severe persecution at the hands of all classes of men, both religious and irreligious, because I continued to affirm that I had seen a vision.

During the space of time which intervened between the time I had the vision, and the year eighteen hundred and twenty three, having been forbidden to join any of the religious sects of the day, and being of very tender years, and persecuted by those who ought to have been my friends, and to have treated me kindly and if they supposed me to be deluded to have endeavored in a proper and affectionate manner to have reclaimed me, I was left to all kinds of temptations, and mingling with all kinds of society, I frequently fell into many foolish errors and displayed the weakness of youth and the corruption of human nature, which I am sorry to say led me into divers temptations, to the gratification of many appetites offensive in the sight of God. In consequence of these things I often felt condemned for my weakness, and imperfections; when on the evening of the above mentioned

twenty first of September, after I had retired to my bed for the night, I betook myself to prayer and supplication to almighty God for forgiveness of all my sins and follies, and also for a manifestation to me, that I might know of my state and standing before him: for I had full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation, as I had previously had one. While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a light appearing in the room which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside standing in the air for his feet did not touch the floor.

He had on a loose robe of the most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond any thing earthly I have ever seen; nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedingly white and brilliant; his hands were naked and his arms also a little above the wrist. So also were his feet naked, as were his legs a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare. I could discover that he had no other clothing on but this robe, as it was open so that I could see into his bosom. Not only was his robe exceedingly white but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. The room was exceedingly light, but not so very bright as immediately around his person. When I first looked upon him I was afraid, but the fear soon left me. He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Moroni. That God had a work for me to do, and that my name should be had for good and evil, among all nations, kindreds, and tongues; or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people. He said there was a book deposited written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fullness of the everlasting gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants. Also that there were two stones in silver bows, and these stones fastened to a breastplate constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim, deposited with the plates, and the possession and use of these stones was what constituted seers in ancient or former times, and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book. After telling me these things he commenced quoting the prophecies of the Old Testament, he first quoted part of the third chapter of Malachi; and he quoted also the fourth or last chapter of the same prophecy though with a little variation from the way it reads in our Bibles. Instead of quoting the first verse as it reads in our books he quoted it thus, "For behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall burn as stubble, for they that cometh shall burn them saith the Lord. of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. " And again he quoted the fifth verse thus, "Behold I will reveal unto you the priesthood by the hand of Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. " He also quoted the next verse differently, "And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts Of the children shall turn to their fathers; if it were not so the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming. " In addition to these he quoted the eleventh chapter of Isaiah saying that it was about to be fulfilled. He quoted also the third chapter of Acts, twenty-second and twenty-third verses precisely as they stand in our New Testament. He said that the prophet was Christ, but the day had not yet come when they who would not hear His voice should be cut off from among the people, but soon would come. He also quoted the second chapter of Joel from the twenty-eighth to the last verse. He also said that this was not yet fulfilled but was soon to be. And he further stated the fullness of the Gentiles was soon to come in. He quoted many other passages of Scripture and offered many explanations which cannot be mentioned here. Again he told me that when I got those plates of which he had spoken (for the time that they should be obtained was not yet fulfilled) I should not show them to any

person, neither the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim, only to those to whom I should be commanded to show them, if I did I should be destroyed.

While he was conversing with me about the plates, the vision was opened to my mind that I could see the place where the plates were deposited and that so clearly and distinctly that I knew the place again when I visited it. After this communication I saw the light in the room begin to gather immediately around the person of him who had been speaking to me, and it continued to do so until the room was again left dark except just around him, when instantly I saw as it were a conduit open right up into heaven, and he ascended up till he entirely disappeared and the room was left as it had been before this heavenly light had made its appearance. I lay musing on the singularity of the scene and marveling greatly at what had been told me by this extraordinary messenger, when in the midst of my meditation I suddenly discovered that my room was again beginning to get lighted, and in an instant, as it were, the same heavenly messenger was again by my bedside. He commenced and again related the very same things which he had done at his first visit without the least variation, which having done, he informed me of great judgments which were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence, and that these grievous judgments would come on the earth in this generation. Having related these things he again ascended as he had done before. By this time so deep were the impressions made on my mind that sleep had fled from my eyes and I lay overwhelmed in astonishment at what I had both seen and heard; but what was my surprise when again I beheld the same messenger at my bedside, and heard him rehearse or repeat over again to me the same things as before and added a caution to me, telling me that Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father's family) to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich. This he forbade me, saying that I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive but that of building His Kingdom, otherwise I could not get them. After this third visit he again ascended up into heaven as before and I was again left to ponder on the strangeness of what I had just experienced, when almost immediately after the heavenly messenger had ascended from me the third time, the cock crew, and I found that day was approaching so that our interviews must have occupied the whole of that night. I shortly after arose from my bed, and as usual went to the necessary labors of the day, but in attempting to labor as at other times, I found my strength so exhausted as rendered me entirely unable. My father who was laboring along with me discovered something to be wrong with me and told me to go home. I started with the intention of going to the house, but in attempting to cross the fence out of the field where we were, my strength entirely failed me and I fell helpless on the ground and for a time was quite unconscious of anything. The first thing that I can recollect was a voice speaking unto me calling me by name. I looked up and beheld the same messenger standing over my head surrounded by light as before. He then again related unto me all that he had related to me the previous night, and commanded me to go to my father and tell him of the vision and commandments which I had received. I obeyed, I returned back to my father in the field and rehearsed the whole matter to him. He replied to me, that it was of God, and to go and do as commanded by the messenger. I left the field and went to the place where the messenger had told me the plates were deposited; and owing to the distinctness of the vision which I had had concerning it, I knew the place the instant that I arrived there.

Finding the Plates at Hill Cumorah

Convenient to the village of Manchester, Ontario County, New York, stands a hill of considerable size, and the most elevated of any in the neighborhood; on the west side of this hill not far from the

top, under a stone of considerable size, lay the plates deposited in a stone box: this stone was thick and rounding in the middle on the upper side, and thinner towards the edges, so that the middle part of it was visible above the ground, but the edge all around was covered with earth. Having removed the earth and obtained a lever which I got fixed under the edge of the stone and with a little exertion raised it up, I looked in and there indeed did I behold the plates, the Urim and Thummim and the Breastplate as stated by the messenger. The box in which they lay was formed by laying stones together in some kind of cement; in the bottom of the box were laid two stones crossways of the box, and on these stones lay the plates and the other things with them. I made an attempt to take them out but was forbidden by the messenger and was again informed that the time for bringing them forth had not yet arrived, neither would be until four years from that time, but he told me that I should come to that place precisely in one year from that time, and that he would there meet with me, and that I should continue to do so until the time should come for obtaining the plates. Accordingly as I had been commanded I went at the end of each year, and at each time I found the same messenger there and received instruction and intelligence from him at each of our interviews respecting what the Lord was going to do and how and in what manner His Kingdom was to be conducted in the last days.

There were three witnesses who testified that God showed them the original plates containing the original writings of the Book of Mormon. In hundreds of interviews, over many decades, these three witnesses consistently maintained until their deaths that they had seen these things by the power of God.

In the course of the work of the translation, we ascertained that three special witnesses were to be provided by the Lord, to whom he would grant that they should see the plates from which this work (the Book of Mormon) should be translated, and that these witnesses should bear record of the same.

Almost immediately after we had made this discovery, it occurred to Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and the aforementioned Martin Harris (who had come to inquire after our progress in the work) that they would have me inquire of the Lord, to know if they might not obtain of Him to be these three special witnesses. (Joseph Smith made enquiry and received approval of these men as the Three Witnesses.)

Not many days after...Martin Harris, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery and myself agreed to retire into the woods, and try to obtain by fervent and humble prayer, the fulfillment of the promises given in the revelation; that they should have a view of the plates. We accordingly made choice of a piece of woods convenient to Mr. Whitmer's house, to which we retired, and having knelt down we began to pray in much faith to Almighty God to bestow upon us a realization of these promises. According to previous arrangements I commenced, by vocal prayer to our Heavenly Father, and was followed by each of the rest in succession. We did not yet, however, obtain any answer, or manifestation of the divine favor in our behalf. We again observed the same order of prayer each calling on and praying fervently to God in rotation; but with the same result as before. Upon this our second failure, Martin Harris proposed that he would withdraw himself from us, believing as he expressed himself that his presence was the cause of our not obtaining what we wished for; he accordingly withdrew from us, and we knelt down again, and had not been many minutes engaged in prayer when presently we beheld a light above us in the air of exceeding brightness, and behold an angel stood before us. In his hands he held the plates which we had been praying for these to have a view of: he turned over the leaves one by one, so that we could see them, and discover the engravings thereon distinctly. He addressed himself to David Whitmer, and said, "David, blessed is

the Lord, and he that keeps His commandments." When immediately afterwards, we heard a voice from out of the bright light above us, saying, "These plates have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God; the translation of them which you have seen is correct, and I command you to bear record of what you now see and hear."

I now left David and Oliver and went in pursuit of Martin Harris, who I found at a considerable distance, fervently engaged in prayer, he soon told me however that he had not yet prevailed with the Lord, and earnestly requested me to join him in prayer, that he also might realize the same blessings which we had just received. We accordingly joined in prayer, and ultimately obtained our desires, for before we had yet finished, the same vision was opened to our view; at least it was again to me, and I once more beheld and heard the same things; whilst at the same moment, Martin Harris cried out, apparently in ecstasy of joy, "Tis enough; mine eyes have beheld," and jumping up he shouted, "Hosannah!" blessing God, and otherwise rejoiced exceedingly. Having thus through the mercy of God obtained these manifestations, it now remained for these three individuals to fulfill the commandment which they had received; to bear record of these things...they drew up and subscribed the following document:

The Testimony of Three Witnesses

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come, that we, through the grace of God the rather, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record, which is a record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people of Jared, who came from the tower of which hath been spoken; and we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for His voice hath declared it unto us: wherefore we know of a surety, that the work is true. And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; and they have been strewn unto us by the power of God, and not of man. And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and we know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that we beheld and bear record that these things are true; and it is marvelous in our eyes, nevertheless, the voice of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it; wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, we bear testimony of these things. And we know that if we are faithful in Christ we shall rid our garments of the blood of all men, and be found spotless before the judgment seat of Christ, and shall dwell with Him eternally in the heavens. And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen. OLIVER COWDERY, DAVID WHITMER, MARTIN HARRIS.

Soon after these things had transpired, the following additional testimony was obtained:

And Also the Testimony of Eight Witnesses

Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come, that Joseph Smith, Jr., the translator of this work, has strewn unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated, we did handle with our hands: and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship. And this we bear record with words of soberness, that the said Smith has strewn unto us, for we have seen and hefted, and know of a surety, that the said Smith has got the plates of which we have spoken. And we give our names unto the world to witness unto the world that which we have seen; and we lie not, God bearing

witness of it. CHRISTIAN WHITMER, JACOB WHITMER, PETER WHITMER, JR., JOHN WHITMER, HIRAM PAGE, JOSEPH SMITH SEN., HYRUM SMITH, SAMUEL H. SMITH.

CHRIST'S RESTORED CHURCH

What did Jesus mean when he said "I will build my church"?

Evangelicals assert that wherever there is *ecclesia*, an assembly of believers, there is the church of Christ. Multitudes were gathered to hear Christ preach the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1). Believers followed Him to Peter's house (Matthew 8:14-16). His disciples followed Him wherever He went (Matthew 8:23). In Matthew 13, the crowds were so large that He had to get in a boat to speak to them on the shore (Matthew 13:1-2).

In Matthew 14, Jesus fed 5,000, many of whom were healed of sicknesses (Matthew 14: 13-21). How could they be healed and miracles occur if there were not believers in their midst? Obviously, there were. In Gennesaret, many people touched the hem of His garment and were healed (Matthew 14:34-36). Four thousand believers experienced healing and other miracles by the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 15:29-39).

If the church of Christ truly was constituted by a simple gathering of believers, then the church had already been established at the Sermon on the Mount, beside the lake, at Gennesaret, and by the Sea of Galilee. But let's read further. Then Christ came to the region of Caesarea Philippi:

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matthew 16:13-18

Assuming that the church already existed at the mount, by the lake, at Gennesaret, and by the Sea of Galilee, why then did Jesus say in Matthew 16 "I *will* build my church" as if this would happen in the future?

It must be that the original evangelical premise is faulty. The church of Christ is not simply a gathering of believers. There must be other elements of the church that had yet to be established. I Corinthians 12:28 tells us that there were "helps" and "governments" to bless the New Testament church.

When He arrived at Caesarea Philippi, Christ had not yet established His church, yet He promised that He would do so in the future. This is because the church of Christ is comprised of more than simply a gathering of believers. *It is an assembly of believers united by formally called and ordained ministry and holy ordinances.*

After the cross, the New Testament church clearly had helps and governments that Christ had not yet revealed to His disciples in Matthew 16. In Matthew 16, Christ's church had not yet been established. When Christ said "I *will* build my church," He was explaining to His disciples that the other elements of His church would soon be established.

What was the "rock" upon which Christ's church was founded?

When Christ got to Caesarea Philippi, the first question he asked was, "Whom do *men* say that I the Son of man am? (Matthew 16:13-18)" They gave Him several erroneous responses that they had heard from various people.

Then He asked another question, "But whom say ye that I am?" Most of the disciples had failed to ask God. Only Peter was able to answer correctly that Jesus was the Christ, the son of God. Then Jesus said something very interesting. He said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: *for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*" Jesus wanted his disciples to go directly to God for insight and not rely on men to tell them the truth. In verse 21, Jesus began to teach them that He would soon go to Jerusalem to die and be resurrected. Jesus knew that He would not be with them for long. He wanted them to rely on revelation from God, not the teaching of men. The "rock" that Jesus wanted the New Testament church to be founded on was not just Jesus Christ, but the *revelation* of Jesus Christ. He didn't want believers simply to trust men's words but God's revelation directly to them. Do you want a relationship with Christ in which you continually ask your pastor for answers to perplexing problems, or do you want to go directly to the source of all wisdom? After you have studied His word, "revelation" is the means by which you can know the truth and have a deeper, more abiding relationship with Jesus, our Lord. He says, "My sheep listen to my voice" (John 10:27).

What does Matthew 16:18 mean in saying that "the gates of hell would not prevail" against the church?

Many fundamentalists use Matthew 16 as a proof text to prop up the idea that the church of Christ has existed continually, without interruption, from the time of Christ until today. Many will assert that there was no apostasy. They claim a divinely preserved descendency from the Roman Catholic church, as if Catholicism carried the ball for a while and then handed it off to the Reformation, all with no apostasy or deviation from the truth. They say that, "Believers have always existed somewhere. Though we can't tell you their names, we know, by Matthew 16, that the church of Christ has remained continuously on the earth without interruption." As adherents of Christ's restored gospel, we believe Matthew 16:18 to be the word of God, but we believe that our evangelical friends add more to this passage than the text will support. There is nothing about this passage that guarantees an uninterrupted, continuous succession of Christ's church throughout the ages. Restorationists maintain that Christ's church will arise and ultimately reign triumphant eschatologically -- as a culmination of history, not as an uninterrupted process over time. The idea being that, in the interim, apostasy is not only possible, but has actually occurred. Roger Williams founded the first Baptist church in North America. Williams even concluded that the theory of a continuous, uninterrupted succession simply did not make sense. *In Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America*, Edwin Gaustad conveys Williams' thoughts on this subject: Christ's appointed apostles, commissioned directly by him, could establish a true church, with true acts of worship, with a congregation of the purified and redeemed. But how, sixteen hundred years later, could such a church be formed? The doctrine of apostolic succession might seem to be the answer: that the authority and commission of Christ had been transmitted, generation by generation, from his own time to the present. But that would mean that a wholly false church, the papal Antichrist, could in its impurity faithfully preserve and rightly pass on a wholly pure power. And that made no sense at all. After Constantine, a true ministry no longer existed, and none but God could now bring it back. Williams did not come to this position easily, nor did he find it easy to persuade others that recreating the true church of Christ was a vain pursuit -- apart from direct divine intervention. (Edwin S. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America*, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1991, p. 91).

Let's use an analogy to explain what is meant by "prevail." In a football game, assume that team A gets off to a 20 to nothing lead in the first minute of the game, and team A maintains that lead until the last minute of the game. Suddenly, in the last 60 seconds, team B scores four quick touchdowns and wins the game 28 to 20. Who has "prevailed"? The team that lead for 58 minutes, or the one that was ahead at the end of the game? Obviously, it would be team B who was ahead at the end of the game. At the culmination of history, Christ's church will also reign triumphant.

Some say that there was only a "partial" apostasy suggesting that the church merely needed reforming, not restoring. But isn't that a little like being "partially" pregnant? Can there really be such a thing as a "partial" apostasy? Regarding Roger Williams, Gaustad again writes:

For Williams, who wrote of the "restless unsatisfiedness of my soul," found no enduring peace, not even in the church molded by his own hands. What authority did he have to be baptized or to baptize others? What line of apostolic continuity could be traced to that score of Bible believers who agreed to worship together? What biblical commission or divine command set this church apart or perhaps even above all others? In writing to John Winthrop as early as 1636, Williams bemoaned the spiritual nakedness of New England's churches but added the hope that within a few years the Lord would reveal "the first and most ancient path" more plainly "to you and me." More than a dozen years later, in a letter to Winthrop's son, Williams indicated that he found no churches organized "after the first pattern" As he came to appreciate the New Testament pattern more fully, Williams gradually reached a much-dreaded conclusion -- namely, that no true church of Jesus Christ was possible, at least not until Christ came again. (Edwin S. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America*, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1991, p. 90-91).

More important than the terms we use to diagnose the condition of Christ's church are the solutions that the Reformation and the Restoration use to repair damage done and return to the truth of the New Testament. Some Reformers like Martin Luther wanted to remove the epistle of James from the New Testament canon and reformulate Christ's message around a "faith alone" gospel. Others like John Calvin often attempted to alter Christian thinking by sheer force of intellect rather than revelation from God.

The Restoration teaches believers to ask God and test what they receive by scripture (James 1:5 & Acts 17:10-11). The fact is that Christ's New Testament church consisted of more than simply a gathering of believers. His church was founded on the rock of the revelation of Jesus Christ, and that is the same means that he commands every believer to use to obtain truth and direction for their lives: revelation.

As Roger Williams admitted, there was no line of continuity that could be traced back to the New Testament church via Catholicism. The powers of hell will eventually face total and unquestionable defeat, but until that time, New Testament prophecy indicates that apostasy would be possible and even likely to occur.

Did the New Testament foretell an apostasy?

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. II Thessalonians 2:1-3

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and

bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. II Peter 2:1-2

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. II Thessalonians 2:3

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; II Timothy 4:3

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Acts 20:29-30

These are just a few of the passages in which the New Testament church was repeatedly warned of an apostasy or falling away. In order to maintain their theory of a continuous, uninterrupted succession from the Roman Catholic church, Evangelicals maintain that any apostasy was only "partial." Supposedly, the Roman Catholic church only needed reforming, and the New Testament church did not need to be restored.

But if we are supposed to establish everything by the word of God, where does the Bible indicate that any apostasy would only be "partial"? Those who believe in the "partial" apostasy theory never provide scriptural evidence to support their view. Did any Reformers actually claim that God directed them to reform the Catholic church? No. Did they claim to be taught by God, by revelation as Peter was? No, they did not.

Did the Reformers believe that an apostasy had occurred?

....the apostasy of Antichrist hath so far corrupted all that there can be no recovery out of that apostasy till Christ shall send forth new apostles to plant churches anew. (Roger Williams, *Struggles and Triumphs of Religious Liberty*, p. 238-239)

We argue that all Christian sects are more or less apostatized from the institutions of the Savior; that by all the obligations of the Christian religion, they that fear and love the Lord are bound to return to the ancient order of things in the spirit and truth. (Alexander Campbell, *Christian Baptist*, vol. 5, p.402)

We seldom hear of them [manifestations of the gifts] after that fatal period when the Emperor Constantine called himself a Christian From this time they almost totally ceased. The cause of this was not (as has been vulgarly supposed) because there was no more occasion for them, because all the world was become Christian. This is a miserable mistake; not a twentieth part of it was then nominally Christians. The real cause was, the love of man, ... was waxed cold. The Christians had no more of the Spirit of Christ, than the other heathens..... This was the real cause, why the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost were no longer to be found in the Christian church; because the Christians were turned heathens again, and had only a dead form left. (John Wesley, Sermon 94)

The old time gospel, and the gifts thereof are lost. False doctrines prevail in all the churches on the face of the earth. All we can do is exhort the people to be just, fear god, shun evil, and pray. Prayer and purity may cause an angel to visit some deep depressed soul. But I tell you that within one hundred years, God will have spoken. He will restore the church again. I see a little band of people led by a prophet and a faithful leader. Some will be persecuted and burned out and murdered. From every nation shall true believers be gathered by speedy messengers. And then shall the Almighty God speak to the disobedient nations with thunder and lightning, and destruction such as men have never know before. (Christophilus Gratianus, leader of Swiss Pietism, *Die Hoffnung Zions* (i.e. Zion's Hope), 1732, University Library of Bazel, Switzerland)

In 1820, God spoke to Joseph Smith, Jr. telling him not to affiliate with any denomination. Please read the following testimony of Joseph Smith, Jr. Like the Bereans, test what you read by the word of God found in the Bible, and then ask God for direction (Acts 17:11; James 1:5).

I was born in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and five, on the twenty-third day of December, in the town of Sharon, Windsor County, state of Vermont. My father, Joseph Smith, senior, left the state of Vermont, and moved to Palmyra, Ontario (now Wayne) County, in the state of New York, when I was in my tenth year. In about four years after my father's arrival at Palmyra, he moved with his family into Manchester, in the same county of Ontario. His family, consisting of eleven souls, namely: My father, Joseph Smith, my mother, Lucy Smith, (whose name, previous to her marriage was Mack, daughter of Solomon Mack,) my brothers, Alvin, (who is now dead,) Hyrum, myself, Samuel Harrison, William, Don Carlos, and my sisters, Sophronia, Catherine, and Lucy. Some time in the second year after our removal to Manchester, there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects in that region of country; indeed, the whole district of country seemed affected by it, and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division amongst the people, some crying, "lo, here," and some "lo, there;" some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptists. For, notwithstanding the great love which the converts for these different faiths expressed at the time of their conversion, and the great zeal manifested by the respective clergy, who were active in getting up and promoting this extraordinary scene of religious feeling, in order to have everybody converted, as they were pleased to call it, let them join what sect they pleased. Yet, when the converts began to file off, some to one party, and some to another, it was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both the priests and the converts were more pretended than real, for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued; priest contending against priest, and convert against convert, so that all the good feelings, one for another, if they ever had any, were entirely lost in a strife of words, and a contest about opinions. I was at this time in my fifteenth year. My father's family was proselyted' to the Presbyterian faith, and four of them joined that church, namely, my mother Lucy, my brothers Hyrum, Samuel Harrison, and my sister Sophronia. During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness; but though my feelings were deep and often pungent, still I kept myself aloof from all those parties, though I attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit. But in process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them, but so great was the confusion and strife among the different denominations that it was impossible for a person, young as I was and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong. My mind at different times was greatly excited, the cry and tumult was so great and incessant. The Presbyterians were most decided against the Baptists, and Methodists, and used all their powers of either reason or sophistry to prove their errors, or at least to make the people think they were in error: on the other hand the Baptists and Methodists in their turn were equally zealous to establish their own tenets, and disprove all others. In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself, What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right? Or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right which is it, and how shall I know it? While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth unto all men liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Never did any passage of Scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It

seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God I did, for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had would never know; for the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passage so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible. At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God. I at length came to the determination to "ask of God," concluding that if He gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom and would give liberally, and not upbraid, I might venture. So in accordance with this my determination, to ask of God, I retired to the woods to make the attempt.

The Vision in the Grove

It was on the morning of a beautiful clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty. It was the first time in my life that I had made such an attempt, for amidst all my anxieties I had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally. After I had retired into the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such astounding influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction. But exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction, not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world who had such a marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being. Just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun; which descended gradually until it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages (whose brightness and glory defy all description) standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name, and said, (pointing to the other,) "This is My beloved Son, hear Him. "

My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right? that I might know which to join. No sooner therefore did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, than I asked the Personage who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right, (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong,) and which I should join. I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in His sight; that those professors were all corrupt, "they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; they teach for doctrine the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof." He again forbade me to join with any of them: and many other things did He say unto me which I cannot write at this time. When I came to myself again I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven. Some few days after I had this vision, I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist preachers who was very active in the before mentioned religious excitement, and conversing with him on the subject of religion I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had. I was greatly surprised at his behavior, he treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there was no such thing as visions or revelations in these days: that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there never would be any more of them. I soon found however that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion and was the cause of great persecution which

continued to increase, and though I was an obscure boy only between fourteen and fifteen years of age and my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world; yet men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a hot persecution, and this was common among all the sects: all united to persecute me. It has often caused me serious reflection both then and since, how very strange it was that an obscure boy of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor, should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day, so as to create in them a spirit of the hottest persecution and reviling. But strange or not, so it was, and was often cause of great sorrow to myself. However, it was nevertheless a fact that I had had a vision. I have thought since that I felt much like Paul when he made his defense before King Agrippa and related the account of the vision he had when he "saw a light and heard a voice," but still there were but few who believed him; some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad; and he was ridiculed, and reviled; but all this did not destroy the reality of his vision. He had seen a vision, he knew he had, and all the persecution under heaven could not make it otherwise, and though they should persecute him unto death, yet he knew and would know unto his latest breath that he had both seen a light, and heard a voice speaking to him, and all the world could not make him think or believe otherwise. So it was with me; I had actually seen a light, and in the midst of that light I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak unto me, or one of them did; and though I was hated and persecuted for saying that I had seen a vision yet it was true, and while they were persecuting me, reviling me and speaking all manner of evil against me falsely for so saying, I was led to say in my heart, Why persecute for telling the truth? I have actually seen a vision, and "who am I that I can withstand God," or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen, for I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dare I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God and come under condemnation. I had now got my mind satisfied so far as the sectarian world was concerned, that it was not my duty to join with any of them, but continue as I was until further directed; I had found the testimony of James to be true, that a man who lacked wisdom might ask of God, and obtain and not be upbraided. I continued to pursue my common avocations in life until the twenty first of September, one thousand eight hundred and twenty three, all the time suffering severe persecution at the hands of all classes of men, both religious and irreligious, because I continued to affirm that I had seen a vision.

How long were apostles and prophets supposed to remain in Christ's church?

Like Roger Williams, many sincere people have earnestly searched for the church of Christ but finally concluded that it did not exist. When Williams left the Baptist church in 1639, instead of uniting with another institution, he remained a Seeker -- one who believed that no true church existed. From that time forward, he lived a life of self-imposed exile. After a sincere and exhaustive search, he was forced to conclude that the true church of Christ could not be found.

The Ephesian letter states that apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are to remain in Christ's church until it achieves what is called the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." We do not observe any evangelical churches affirming this biblical truth. Therefore how could any evangelical churches be the church of Christ?

If you could find the true church of Jesus Christ, what would it look like? Would you know if you had found it? The Bible describes some of the elements of Christ's New Testament church.

And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach. Mark 3:14

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. I Corinthians 12:28

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. Ephesians 4:11

Why did Christ place these offices in His church?

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the edifying of the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:12

How long did Paul's epistle command that these offices were to remain in Christ's church?

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Ephesians 4:13

Many evangelical teachers promote a theory about an "apostolic age" in which the New Testament church supposedly achieved the "measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" long ago. Because of this they say that there is no longer any need for apostles or prophets. If that is the case, there would also no longer be a need for evangelists, pastors or teachers either. Rather than waiting on God to restore His church, they have created their own.

How does Christ's church benefit by having the above offices?

That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4: 14-16

The true church of Christ will affirm that apostles and prophets continue to be necessary today. The fact is that evangelical churches have not been willing to listen to God's voice, to receive direction from Him. Instead, they run ahead of Him creating churches that He never called into existence.

The following verses demonstrate that apostles continued to be called by God long after the cross: And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles. Luke 6:13

And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. Acts 1:26

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. Acts 13:2

Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out. Acts 14:14

Then after three year I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. Galatians 1:18-19

And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. I Corinthians 4:6 & 9

Apostles continued to be called by God in the New Testament church. What biblical injunction can anyone present that this practice was to cease? Based on Ephesians 4, a doctrinally sound church will affirm the need for apostles and prophets.

How could the Ephesian letter say that apostles must continue in the New Testament church when apostles are supposed to be those who directly observed Christ's ministry here on earth?

From the above passages, it is clear that there were at least sixteen people who were called to the office of apostle in the New Testament church.

Some will ask the question, "How could God continue to call apostles after Christ's work was finished and there were no more believers left who had directly observed Christ's ministry?" The underlying assumption behind this question is that God ceases to reveal His will to man, that He is now silent.

The fact is that God is very much alive and is actively involved in the affairs of men. He continues to reveal His will to His church. Even after Christ died on the cross, He revealed Himself to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. This man, who was not an eyewitness of Christ's ministry on earth, became one of the greatest apostles of the New Testament church. If He can reveal Himself to Saul, He can call other apostles as well. This is in keeping with the passage in Ephesians.

Nowhere in the New Testament does it positively state that God intended for the office of apostle to cease at the end of some "apostolic age." There simply is no scriptural evidence to sustain this view. But the Ephesian letter does say that apostles will continue until the church achieves a specific spiritual level. That level of spirituality has not occurred. So apostles are still needed in Christ's church.

What are the primary doctrines of Christ's church?

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

Hebrews 6:1-2

Faith

Faith is much more than easy believism. A true, saving faith bears fruit in acts of love.

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Hebrews 11:6

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. Galatians 5:6 (NIV)

Repentance

Faith "alone" is not enough. A true assurance of salvation involves sincere repentance as well.

Repentance is much more than "a change of mind about who Christ is." It involves a change in the pattern of sin, or as Acts 3:26 says, "turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. Mark 1:14-15

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;... Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities. Acts 3:19 & 26

Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance Luke 3:8

Baptisms

A believer's willingness to be baptized has a direct bearing on their salvation. Is this taught in your church?

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Matthew 10:32-33

And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away they sins, calling on the name of the Lord. Acts 22:16

In it [the ark] only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes *baptism that now saves you* also -- not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. I Peter 3:21 (NIV)

Laying on of Hands

Hebrews 6 refers to baptisms [plural]. The gift of the Holy Spirit is legitimately conveyed by the formal ordinance of laying on hands. Is this practiced in your church?

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. John 3:5

Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money. Acts 8:17-18

And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. Acts 19:6-7

Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. I Timothy 4:14

Laying on hands to administer to the sick is also a practice of Christ's true church. Is this done in your church?

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. James 5:14-15

In Christ's true church, laying on hands is the means that God uses to ordain ministers. Does your church follow this biblical pattern?

And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. Acts 13:3

Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. Acts 6:6

Resurrection of the Dead

Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. I Corinthians 15:51-53

Eternal Judgment

It is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment. Hebrews 9:27

It is common for our evangelical friends to use passages like John 5:24 and Romans 8:1 as prooftexts to say that "believers" will be exempted from the judgment that the rest of the world will face. Many maintain that there will be a separate "believers' judgment" solely for the purpose of determining rewards. Some evangelical teachers even maintain that there will be anywhere from three to twelve separate judgments. If this is the case, then Hebrews 9:27 incorrectly refers to "the" judgment.

While it is true that believers who faithfully endure to the end will find forgiveness and eternal life through the atonement of Christ, there is no passage in the Bible that says believers will have an exemption from the judgment that others face. II Corinthians 5:10 is said to be a reference to this "believers judgment."

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. II Corinthians 5:10

First of all, this is not just a special judgment for believers, but for all people. Secondly, this passage does not simply refer to a judgment of rewards. The words "or bad" even indicate the possibility that they might receive something other than a reward. But in addition, there are many other verses that indicate this theory of a special exemption cannot be substantiated:

For the time is come that *judgment must begin at the house of God*: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? I Peter 4:17-18

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and *there is no respect of persons*. Colossians 3:23-25

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who *without respect of persons* judgeth according to *every man's work* pass the time of your sojourning here in fear. I Peter 1:17

If we [believers] deliberately keep on sinning *after we have received the knowledge of the truth*, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished *who has trampled the Son of God under foot*, who has treated as an unholy thing *the blood of the covenant that sanctified him*, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge *his people*." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Hebrews 10:26-31 (NIV)

Do not be fooled. Judgment must begin at the house of God. As to the criteria by which we are judged, God is no respecter of persons. He will judge according to *every man's work*. Even those who have "received the knowledge of the truth" and been "sanctified" and are "his people" will face the same judgment that others must encounter. It is obvious that this is not simply a judgment of rewards.

Believers will not be exempted from the judgment that the rest of the world has to face. For the benefit of those who have not read all of the above questions and answers, the following additional information about eternal judgment is provided:

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye

clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me..... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not..... And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. Matthew 25:34-36, 41-43 & 46

Who are the righteous that pass on to life eternal? Christ seems to indicate that it is those who believe and bear the fruit of obedience in their lives. Obedience will be a criterion for judgment. This is not just a criterion for judging non-believers. Nothing in this passage suggests that believers will be given a free pass to escape this judgment.

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Hebrews 10:26 (NIV)

A just God will judge each person based on how they have individually responded and will apply the same standard to all people.

How were men saved prior to Sinai, under the Mosaic law and after the cross?

There is only one way that men could ever be saved. Christ is the only door by which we can enter the kingdom. There was not one gospel for the Old Testament and a different one for the New Testament. The same gospel has always been the means of salvation.

This is sometimes called the "antiquity of the gospel" -- the idea that only one gospel has ever saved anyone prior to Sinai, under the Mosaic law and after the cross. Men have always been saved through grace by faith in Jesus Christ. In every age, there has only been one gospel that could save anyone.

Prior to Sinai:

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. Galatians 3:8-9

The Angel [Jesus] which redeemed me [Israel] from all evil Genesis 48:16

Under the Mosaic law:

Search the scriptures [the Old Testament]; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me [Jesus] For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words? John 5:39 & 46
Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. Acts 2:29-31

After the cross

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Acts 4:12

Because this is intended to be a brief explanation, we have included just a few of the biblical references that illustrate this fact. It is important to understand that the same gospel of Christ has always been the only means by which people could be saved and have eternal life.

Nevertheless, many evangelical ministers are confused about this issue. Some maintain that a different plan of salvation applied to those in the Old Testament or that they never knew salvation. That is simply not true. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only way that people could ever be saved.

Was there a church in both the Old and New Testaments?

Not only did the same gospel apply, but believers were unified by a church organization in both eras.

Old Testament

This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in *the church* in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us; Acts 7:37-38

New Testament

And God hath set some in *the church*, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. I Corinthians 12:28

In the Old and New Testament churches, was there a priesthood of all believers?

Prior to Moses, under Moses and after the cross, there was one gospel that brought salvation. Under both the old and new covenants there was a church that served as a means to unite believers. In both as well, God conferred responsibilities upon a priesthood of all believers.

Old Testament

And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. Exodus 19:6

New Testament

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ..... But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. I Peter 2:5 & 9

Evangelicals use I Peter 2 to support their theory that a priesthood of all believers replaced the ministerial priesthoods of the Old Testament. In both the Old and New Testaments, there certainly was a universal priesthood of all believers who had sacred duties, but there is no indication in either testament that this replaced the ministerial functions in Christ's church.

If ministerial functions were replaced by a priesthood of all believers, why are offices like pastor, elder and deacon so frequently evident in evangelical churches? Why not entrust the functions previously performed by God's ministers to the laity and have them preach every Sunday? Why do evangelical churches rely so heavily upon one central personality to provide spiritual guidance and leadership?

There certainly was a priesthood of all believers in the New Testament church, and they had sacred responsibilities before God. But there is no evidence in the Bible that a priesthood of all believers usurped the authority of ministerial functions in Christ's church.

In the Old and New Testament churches, were there ministerial offices?

Prior to Sinai

Before the Mosaic law was ever given, the Bible makes it clear that there were priests whom God appointed to provide spiritual leadership for believers.

Then the king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he was the *priest of the most high God*. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all. Genesis 14:18-20

When Melchizedek is described as being "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life," [Hebrews 7:3] it is not suggested that he was a biological anomaly, or an angel in human guise. *Historically Melchizedek appears to have belonged to a dynasty of priest-kings in which he had both predecessors and successors.* (F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Eerdmans Publishing, 1979, p. 137)

When Jethro, *the priest* of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses, and for Israel his people, and that the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel And Jethro said, Blessed be the Lord And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God: and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God. Exodus 18:1,9,10 & 12 And the Lord said unto him, Away, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee; but let not *the priests* and the people break forth upon them [this occurred before priests of Aaron were called]. Exodus 19:24

Under the Mosaic Law

And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons. Exodus 28:1

And thou shalt anoint them, as thou didst anoint their father, that they may minister unto me in the *priest's office*: for their anointing shall surely be *an everlasting priesthood* throughout their generations. **Exodus 40:15**

After the cross

In Romans 15, Paul referred to his priestly duty as a minister of Christ:

I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be *a minister* of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the *priestly duty* of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:15-16 (NIV)

In the New Testament, even though certain priestly duties continued, Christ established different ministerial functions and offices from those that existed under the Mosaic law.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are to remain in Christ's church until the entire church arrives at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. No church has yet done that. So all of these offices are still needed in Christ's church.

In Christ's church, should men simply call themselves to offices of ministry?

In evangelical churches, it is often the case that men subjectively "feel" a call to become ministers, and they simply appoint themselves to be ministers of God. This was not God's pattern as described in Exodus.

Old Testament

And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons. Exodus 28:1

There are several points to remember about this passage:

1) God was speaking 2) Through another person in spiritual authority 3) He named a specific candidate 4) From among the children of Israel (i.e. the church) 5) He indicated a specific office

New Testament

In Hebrews 5:4, we are told that ministers do not simply call themselves to ministry, but that any calling must follow the pattern given in Exodus 28:1:

And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. Hebrews 5:4

How are ministers to be ordained in Christ's church?

Many of our evangelical friends maintain that choosing and ordination are the same thing. They believe that the word "ordain" used in scripture simply means "appoint" and nothing more. So in John 15:16, when Jesus said, "I have chosen you and ordained you," what He supposedly meant was that He had *chosen* His disciples and *appointed* His disciples.

However, when Jesus referred to choosing and ordaining, He used the word "and" as if these were two separate functions. If one strictly limits the word "ordain" to mean "appoint," the above words of Christ appear redundant. Why would He say "I have chosen you *and* appointed you"?

There are obviously cases in scripture where ordain means appoint, but in this passage it doesn't make sense. The word "ordain" can also refer to "conferring ministerial authority." Thus, Jesus was actually saying, "I have chosen you and conferred ministerial authority upon you." How was this done?

There was no eyewitness description detailing how Jesus conferred authority, but there are scriptural references that illustrate a New Testament tradition of laying on hands to confer ministerial authority:

And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. Acts 6: 2-6

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. Acts 13:1-3

Much more could be said about this subject, but we would like for you to remember that laying on hands to confer ministerial authority did not end at the cross. It is still the pattern that we should follow today. That is why the epistle to Timothy commands us to exercise caution in ordaining men to ministry:

Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure. I Timothy 5:22

In both churches, were there holy ordinances that only ministers performed?

Old Testament

In Moses' day, there was a contingent of 250 princes, men of renown, who stood in direct opposition to ministerial priesthods. They were led by a man named Korah who started a rebellion against the priesthood of the Aaronic order. They demanded that the priesthood of all believers be allowed to usurp the authority of the God's ministers in administering holy ordinances.

And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown. And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord? Numbers 16:2-3

These rebels suggested that the priesthood of all believers should replace the ministerial priesthood of the Old Testament church. How did God respond to their demand that all believers be allowed to administer holy ordinances? All 250 leaders were swallowed by the earth, and 14,700 were stricken by a plague (Numbers 16:31-50).

God's response to Korah's rebellion indicates that there clearly were functions in God's church that only ministerial priesthods were to perform. In the New Testament church, there continued to be a ministerial priesthood and a priesthood of all believers.

New Testament

Even after the cross, holy ordinances continued to be performed by the ministers of Christ's church: But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women..... Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. Acts 8:12-19

Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. James 5:14
Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. I Timothy 4:14

The holy ordinances of Christ's New Testament church even had an impact on the salvation of souls: I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. John 6:51-57

Why does Jude 1:11 warn us that "Korah's rebellion" will occur again?

The epistle of Jude warns us that Korah's rebellion will occur in the last days. There will be Christians who say that the priesthood of all believers should replace ministerial functions in Christ's church.

Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals -- these are the very things that destroy them. Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion. Jude 1:10-11 (NIV)

This is the same rebellious spirit that has possessed many evangelical churches who profess a gospel of easy believism and an anti-authoritarian message that promotes denominational division. The epistle of Jude warns the New Testament church that Korah's rebellion will occur again. The priesthood of all believers will once again attempt to usurp the authority of God's ministers.

Isn't Christ the only mediator between God and me?

The answer to that question is emphatically "yes." I Timothy 2:5 tells us, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Many of our evangelical friends have been caught in a system of worship where they refer every spiritual decision to a pastor, a central personality whose influence pervades every aspect of congregational life.

Every Sunday, they listen to their pastor preach that week's sermon. When problems arise, they counsel with the pastor. Whether they remain in a particular congregation is largely determined by their assessment of that pastor's ministry. As a result, congregational life in evangelical churches often becomes very dependent on the effectiveness of one personality. Followers are often dependent on their pastor for direction in every spiritual decision that must be made.

But in James' letter, believers are commanded to ask of God:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. James 1:5

What a marvelous promise! "You mean, if I simply ask God, believing that He will answer, He will provide direction for my life?" Yes, that is exactly what we are saying. Time after time, God has proven that He is true to His word.

Literally millions of lives have been changed by this simple promise. God speaks today, and if He cares for the sparrow, doesn't He know every concern that weighs upon you? Go directly to Him for the answers.

However, be sure to test every impression that you receive by the word of God. God never contradicts himself. His message is utterly consistent in every regard. Direction that you receive must be tested in the light of scripture, and it will not contradict that which has already been given. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Acts 17: 10-12

The Bereans did two things that God commended them for: 1) they received the word with readiness of mind and 2) they tested everything that they received by the word of God already given to them. Many of our evangelical friends have done the second of these, but many have neglected the first in claiming that God is now silent.

Friend, God is not silent. He has guidance for your life. All He asks is that you come to Him through the mediator of Christ, our Lord.

Doesn't Hebrews 7:12 say that ministerial priesthoods ended at the cross?

Evangelicals have a commonly held belief that the priesthood of all believers somehow replaced ministerial priesthoods. However both ministers and believers existed prior to the Mosaic law as shown in previous answers above. This was also the case in the church under Moses. No scripture in the New Testament states that ministerial priesthoods ended at the cross. In the following passage, it merely says that there was a "change," not an end:

For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. Hebrews 7:12

To any serious student of the Bible, there is no doubt that ceremonial practices such as animal sacrifices ended at the cross. Feasts and holidays that governed the nation of Israel are not officially observed by Christians in this age. The New Testament clearly did not perpetuate these aspects of the Mosaic law.

However at the same time, Christians continue to believe in the Great Commandment. They also affirm the principles of the Ten Commandments. For many years, they used to observe one day a week as a Sabbath day of rest. Each of these practices has its roots in the law of Moses.

When the Hebrew epistle says there was a change in the priesthood, it is entirely appropriate to allow for the possibility that ministerial functions continued as well. There continued to be ministers in Christ's church, but the specific functions that they performed changed when Christ offered the last, great sacrifice upon the cross. There was definitely a change in both priesthood and law after Christ's crucifixion.

Doesn't Hebrews 7:24 say that Christ's priesthood was untransferable?

But this man [Jesus], because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Hebrews 7:24
In Hebrews 7:24, the King James Version tells us that Christ has "an unchangeable priesthood." The NIV interprets this as "permanent priesthood." The Greek word for unchangeable and permanent is *aparabotos*. Some pundits have attempted to say that this word should be translated as "untransferable," thereby suggesting that Christ's priesthood ended and could not be transferred to any man. But Vine's Expository Dictionary states:

"*Aparabotos* is used of the priesthood of Christ, in Heb. 7:24, 'unchangeable,' 'unalterable, inviolable,' RV, marg. (a meaning found in the papyri); the more literal meaning in KJV and RV margins, 'that doth not pass from one to another,' is not to be preferred. This active meaning is not only untenable, and contrary to the constant usage of the word, but does not adequately fit with either the preceding or the succeeding context."

Will there be ministerial priests in Christ's church in the last days?

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand.... Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let *the priests, the ministers of the Lord*, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God? Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people. Joel 2:1 & 15-18

For the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her *priests* with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. Psalm 132:13-16

INVITATION

Are you truly converted to Christ's gospel? Do you attend an evangelical church that is doctrinally unsound?

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. Romans 10:2-3

Many times popular churches are driven by emotion or by the charisma of an individual leader rather than biblical doctrine. There are many active evangelical churches with wonderful programs that meet social needs.

However, we are commanded to worship God "in Spirit and in truth" (John 4:23). II Corinthians 11:4 reprimands the saints at Corinth for accepting false doctrines about Jesus and His gospel. This passage provides a biblical test that can help you identify false doctrine. We are to beware those who teach "another Jesus" or "another gospel" from that taught in the Bible.

Perhaps you have been caught in the word-faith movement that teaches a false prosperity gospel and a false concept of Jesus. Perhaps you have wandered into aberrant practices such as the "slain in the Spirit" phenomena. Perhaps you've mistakenly embraced the concept that speaking in tongues is necessary for salvation. It may be that you are affiliated with a mainstream evangelical church whose pastor has honestly, yet mistakenly perpetuated doctrinal error.

You can find a loving and faithful body of saints who want to help you find answers to these and other perplexing issues. We invite you to contact us via the Internet at **ADDRESS**. There are lay ministers who will be happy to respond to any inquiries that you might have.

In Christ's restored church, you can find: Christ-centered ministry A personal relationship with God who speaks in this day A true assurance of salvation A gospel that is more than easy believism or mere acceptance A church that is founded on the revelation of Jesus Christ A body of people that affirms the need for apostles and prophets The promise of God's earthly kingdom

Please consider a deeper commitment to your Creator, a true assurance of salvation, and an abiding relationship with Him. We will be happy to share more about the good news of Christ's gospel with you.