Scriptural Apologetics 101

Basic Bible Doctrines

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International Missionary Baptist Publishing Ministry

Scriptural Apologetics 101
By John Scott Roesch

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Foreword

Scriptural Apologetics 101 serves as an excellent book for studying the basic Bible Doctrines. They are set forth in a simple and easily understandable way. Bible Teacher John Scott Roesch is a very knowledgeable teacher of the Bible. Each reader would do well by learning from this book.

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To this ministry

For giving my retirement a purpose

Apologetics is a word that some people are scared of for really no reason at all. Put in the simplest terms, it is knowing *why* you believe something.

Children that believe in Santa Claus will tell you that they believe because someone (many times the parents) told them about him. They might mention that there are a lot of television specials about him as well.

That is the foundation of their faith in their belief. Their honest trust in the people who told them this doesn't make Santa any more real.

Just because someone tells you something; just because you've heard it all your life; in fact, just because you've heard something in a sermon doesn't mean it was right. Unchecked but trusted facts can lead to heresy; Scripture even tells us to try the spirits.

This book contains scripture to back up our beliefs, and is the first in a series of books to equip anyone with the facts to prove or disprove their beliefs.

This purpose of this isn't to insult anyone; its sole intention is to explain what the Bible teaches in a kind but straightforward way.

These are not Baptist beliefs, they are Biblical beliefs, told in a non-complicated (we hope) way.

Thank you, and God bless.

John Roesch

All Scripture is From the King James Version of the Holy Bible

What we believe concerning the rapture can have many different effects on us as believers. I live in Florida, and on more than one occasion, we've experienced strong hurricanes. When we're warned of one of these, we make preparations; we stock up on non-perishable food (in case the power goes out); water, in case our water supply becomes non-purified and we can't boil it because our stoves are electric.

We buy enough batteries for anything that uses them, including flashlights and radios, among other things.

It is only because we are warned of the storm that allows us to prepare for it. If earthquakes had early warning, five or six days in advance, those warnings, I am sure, would not go unheeded.

We all know and have witnessed to those unsaved around us, and many times this witnessing involves the return of Jesus. Those who believe in the pre-tribulation rapture probably tell how the next event on God's calendar is the rapture of the saved, and how bad the world would be afterwards, warning them that they don't want to be here when that happens.

If they have the timing of the rapture wrong, when these events in Revelation come to pass, two things will be different. First, they are wondering why they are still here, and that (they believe) the Bible was wrong, and if that's the case, what else was it wrong concerning? They can end up with a broken spirit.

Second, those that they witnessed to will have no reason to believe anything they were told about the Bible because this one thing that they are part of, these events, show that they were lied to about the Bible, and this can harden a heart.

Without any preparation, living in these times would be even more difficult than it should be; it's already expected to be demanding.

In this study, we want you to see why a pre-tribulation rapture is a heresy, and the mid-tribulation belief stands up to scripture.

We will look first at the prophesy of the 70 weeks, giving us the timeframe of these events.

70 Weeks of Daniel

The seventieth week of Daniel is quickly approaching, for those wanting a refresher course, or simply to see our perspective on it, let us go into a little detail at this point.

Daniel chapter 9 contains what is arguably the most important prophecy recorded, for it shows the timetable of God's plan of redemption.

Daniel 9

24 Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. 25 Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. 26 And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto

the end of the war desolations are determined. 27 And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

The first word in the Hebrew of Daniel 9:24 is שָׁבֻעִ֔ים (šā·ḇu·‘îm) or *weeks*: literally a collection of sevens; but these are not weeks of days but weeks of years.

A year has different lengths based on the calendar it is derived from. A Gregorian or Julian year is either 365 or 366 days, depending on if it is a leap year or not.

A Jewish year will have either 353, 354, 355, 383 ,384, or 385 days, because they use leap months, not days, as well as add or subtract a day to prevent Rosh Hoshana from falling on certain days of the week. A Hebrew (civil) year begins on Tishrei 1, but the Jewish (religious) year begins on Nisan 1.

The Hindi and Chinese calendars are similar to the Hebrew, but the length of the years doesn’t coincide, so they are the same length, but not at the same time.

So how long is the year recorded in Daniel 9?

These years are commonly called prophetic years, and are not based on any man-made calendar, as most, if not all, our calendars are solar based (Gregorian, Mayan, and similar) or lunar based (Jewish, Hindi, and such).

A prophetic year is 360 days, and this isn't a number we've pulled out of a hat, we see this timing explained in the book of Revelation, the 12th chapter starting at verse 6, Israel goes into hiding for 1,260 days.

When we get to verse 14, it is called "a time, and times, and half a time". 1 + 2 + 1/2 = 3 1/2, and just a little reasoning would indicate that a time is a year here, making 3 1/2 years as 1,260 days, and a year, or a time as 360 days.

So how long is 70 weeks? A week (of years) would be 2,520 days; multiply that times 70 and you have 176,400 days in this prophesy. If that prophecy began when it was given (circa 530 BC), it would have ended before Jesus had been born. Since that isn't the case, let's see if we can find the beginning of the count.

Luckily the prophecy indicates when it began "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks".

Here we see two events as well as two times; the command to rebuild Jerusalem with its walls and the arrival of Messiah the Prince. Rebuilding Jerusalem would take 49 years, and Jesus would reveal Himself as the Messiah 156,240 days or 434 years after Jerusalem was completed.

We can pinpoint when this was all set in motion thanks to both how the Jewish calendar is based as well as the writing of Nehemiah, who recorded when this event occurred. In Artaxerxes' twentieth year, narrowed down by the Hebrew month of Nisan having just begun. As every Hebrew month begins with the thinnest crescent moon being seen, that would place the date of the decree as between March 5 and 8, 444 BC.

17,640 days later, Jerusalem and its streets and walls were complete, and the countdown to the next part of the prophecy began: Palm Sunday. Messiah the Prince would present Himself to the people as their rightful King, only to be rejected.

However, that is only 69 weeks; the seven to rebuild Jerusalem, and the sixty-two until the Messiah reveals Himself. What happened to that seventieth week?

The rejection of Jesus as Messiah wasn't a surprise to God, so he had a timeout built in. We are inside that timeout right now, and God has never said how long that timeout is to last.

It is referred to as the church age, the time of the gentiles, the age of grace, and sometimes even simply the great timeout. So, when is this timeout over? Scripture tells us in Daniel 9:27.

The prince that shall come is not the Prince recorded in verse 25. Jesus is the Prince of that verse, and a different prince is spoken of after that. Verse 26 speaks of 'the people

of the prince that shall come', but isn't speaking of him specifically. Jerusalem was trodden in AD 70. That wasn't the beginning of the 70th week either.

The event that ends the timeout is the one-week covenant, commonly called the seven-year peace treaty. The world goes quickly downhill after that.

The Doctrine

There are those who would deny the rapture of the saints, first stating that the word rapture doesn't appear in the Bible, and to be honest, it doesn't. Neither does the word dinosaur, but few will say that they never existed because fossil records prove they did. The behemoth described in Job 40:15-24 is a dinosaur, unless you believe an elephant's tail is like a cedar.

The event we refer to as the rapture is described in 1 Thessalonians 4, where the apostle Paul tells us:

> ***14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. 15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.***

In verse 15, the word "prevent" is the Greek word φθάσωμεν (phtha·sō·men) which is also interpreted as to

arrive, to *anticipate*, or to *precede* telling us that those still living don't meet the Lord in the air until the resurrected saints do.

This gives us the events that make up the rapture, and most Christians agree on this order:

(1) The return of the Lord (This isn't the 2nd Coming)

a. The shout

b. The voice of Michael the archangel. We'll cover what he says later. (Some think this is the same as [a], but the events are separated by a comma and a repeat of the word "with".)

c. The trump of God

(2) The resurrection of the dead meeting the Lord in the air. (The 1st resurrection)

(3) The living saints meeting the Lord in the air.

The events we can agree on, for the most part; it's the timing that splits us.

The Heresy

I grew up as a pre-tribulationist. To me, nothing after Revelation 4 affected me until Revelation 19, the wedding supper. I still read and studied it to be able to explain to those I spoke to why they wouldn't want to be around for these events. If someone asked me who I thought the antichrist was, I'd tell them I didn't know or care because I was never going to be around to see him.

I would of course, turn this around and tell them if they knew who the Christ was, they wouldn't meet him either.

Many famous ministers taught a pre-tribulation rapture as well, making it easy to strengthen my belief in it. I learned the concept of parentheticals, the necessary belief explaining why some events were out of order so that they could be emphasized and explained in detail.

The first time I met someone who wasn't pre-tribulation was when we had a visitor once in our Melbourne church who was post-tribulation saying that if John the Baptist (whom Christ told us there was none greater born of woman) went through what he did, we weren't too good to avoid God's wrath.

I've always liked to believe that if I was proven wrong on a doctrinal issue that I'd accept the fact that I was wrong and change my belief. And I did. I can admit when I'm wrong, and I no longer believe this heresy.

Heresy is a strong word, but I'll tell you why I believe it is a hell-spawn doctrine.

If we are spending all our time looking up, we're missing so much of what is going on around us. We don't think we need to get ready for something we think won't affect us, so we'll be unprepared for it when it happens.

The reaction to that will be over-whelming, which can break the spirit of many of God's saints and many will lose faith because they feel that God has forgotten them. It can be believed this is what is referred to as the "great falling away".

The Bible indicates what must happen before we are raptured, and this is the event that separates the Tribulation from the Great Tribulation. Paul was writing to the church at Thessalonica because they had gotten the idea that they had missed the rapture, so he wrote and told them what had to happen first:

2 Thessalonians 2

1 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, 2 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 the day of Christ is at hand. 3 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;

Look closely at verse 3. What has to happen before we are caught up to be with God?

That man of sin must be revealed. Does Paul unveil how this man of sin will be exposed? Who is "that" man of sin? He is known by a few names. Here he is called the "son of perdition."

In Matthew 24 and Mark 13, Jesus calls him "the Abomination of Desolation." In Revelation 13, he is called the "beast".

He is most often referred to today as the "antichrist". Paul tells us in verse 4 how he will be revealed.

4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

If we are raptured before tribulation begins, exactly what is Paul talking about in the first four verses here? If Paul is warning us of some event that no believer will see, why did he refer to this as things that must happen first (verse 3)? Someone's wrong here, and it isn't the apostle Paul.

Where did the idea of a pre-tribulation rapture come from? It certainly isn't scriptural. This doctrine was started by a young Scottish girl named Margaret MacDonald, who said that Christ's return would be in two phases, and not just one. This false doctrine was started around 1830.

Later on, John Nelson Darby further strengthened this false doctrine and gave rise to the false idea that there will be a secret rapture, Because God calling His saints home must be a big secret, they must have thought.

With all the prophesies, warnings, and the effect on the entirety of the world, did they think God would be embarrassed to do this openly?

Scripture doesn't say it begins with a whisper, or even what we call now an 'indoor voice'. You shout when you want everyone to hear you.

Michael the Archangel speaks here, letting the world know what is going on as he tells Jesus to redeem His saints. He doesn't do this for Jesus' sake; the Lord knows what He is doing, it is for the world to know what is going on.

The trump of God announces three things. First is the proclamation that all are in the presence of a King. Second, it declares that the age of grace, the church age, has ended; the time of the gentiles is over.

Lastly it marks the departure of the Holy Spirit from the earth. The Spirit lives in the hearts of the redeemed, and no redeemed are left on earth for now.

Some believe in a secret rapture. What purpose would this serve? If the resurrected receive their glorified body now, why wouldn't we? There will be no doubt in the existence of God at this point, but the rejection is still there.

If there are those wanting to be saved from this time forward, it is too late to be saved by grace. If they wish for heaven, Matthew (Matthew 24:13) as well as Mark (Mark 13:13) tells those remaining how they can get to heaven at this point: believe, but endure until the end (Armageddon and Second Coming of Christ).

They will be enduring without the aid of the Comforter. They will be reading scripture (if they choose to) without a Holy Spirit to provide interpretation. This is not an easy time to find your faith.

They will also have to reject the mark of the beast, which isn't 666; that's his number. The mark might be anything from a tattoo to a chip placed under the skin, visible to a machine, but not to us. Dying for not receiving the mark is the same as enduring until the end.

One of the excuses given in support of this heresy is that the days are constantly being counted. I was of the belief that 1260 days after the signing of the "seven-year peace treaty" you knew Jesus was coming back, yet no one is to be able to know that.

However, some unknown amount of time will indeed pass inside the Great Tribulation that we will be going through:

Revelation 13

14 And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. 15 And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

How long will it take to build this image? We have no idea. How many saints will be killed by this image? We don't know, but we still have to be here if some of us will be killed.

The pre-tribulation believers will tell us that the church is raptured out in Revelation 4:1 when John is told to "come up hither". They stop before reading the purpose of that calling: "and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter."

First off, there is no such a thing as the "rapture of the church". Instead, we have "the rapture of the saints". Is the rapture recorded in the book of Revelation? Yes, it is!

Revelation 14

14 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. 16 And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

Some might say that John didn't say "the son of man", but "like unto the Son of man". This is still Jesus. How did John describe Jesus in Revelation 1?

13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

What other event could this be? Did not an angel tell the apostles “This same Jesus, in like manner ..."? He left on a cloud, so He's returning on a cloud.

A cloud that is missing in Revelation 4:1, along with a sighting. John didn't see Jesus on a cloud, he heard a voice beyond a door in heaven.

How does that even remotely resemble "in like manner"?

The Reality

What are the events that will be unfolding in these end times? After all, we will be experiencing them.

The book of Revelation is divided into three parts.

Revelation 1

> ***17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: 18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. 19 Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;***

The first part (which thou hast seen) is the first chapter: the description of Christ The second part (the things which are) are chapters two and three, the seven letters to the churches.

We will look at the timeline of the things which shall be hereafter, what we will be a part of.

The events that occur in Chapter 4 are heavenly, but we know what will be happening on the earth at this time.

Daniel 9:27 begins by speaking of the as of yet un-revealed antichrist "And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week…" This treaty is often referred to as a seven-year peace treaty. It can only be called that because the 70th week of Daniel is only seven years long. This peace treaty will be open ended, no expiration date.

Peace treaties are usually a good thing; after all, who doesn't want peace? But this treaty comes with a very, very high price.

Dr. Glen Davenport suggests how this controversial document comes into play, and when I heard his take, I remember thinking that this is horrible, but it makes sense.

Here is what Bro. Glen believes will happen, and I admit that the next few thoughts are just "one man's opinion".

What does Israel want more than anything? They have created, for some time now, all the instruments, bowls, ornaments, robes, and altars for the temple. But they cannot reopen this temple because they don't control the temple mount.

What do the Muslims want more than anything? They want Jerusalem, but only because it is the heart of Israel.

This compromise, this document, this covenant that sets everything in motion is when Israel gives up Jerusalem

to gain control of Mount Moriah; of Temple Mount. This will allow them to re-establish temple worship, offer sacrifices, and feel they are in control of their own religion again. This is where “one man’s opinion” ends.

When this treaty is signed, the events of chapter 5 begin; the sealed book is revealed that only Christ can open.

This book has seven seals, and He begins to open each one.

Some give a timeframe between each seal, but no timeframe is recorded in scripture.

Sometime around the opening of the first seal, the two witnesses begin their testimony condemning this treaty. Who they are is unimportant. What they say is.

The first four seals together are commonly referred to as the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

The first horseman (on the white horse) many consider to be the antichrist, but he comes to the forefront later. The horseman is a world leader, given a crown. I believe he is the John-the-Baptist for the antichrist. He will claim to unite, but he will be a divider and conqueror.

The second seal is a great war, represented by a rider on a red horse. What causes this was isn’t revealed, but if you look at the world today, so much of it is on the brink of one now.

The third horse, the black one, represents the rationing, famine, and pestilence that happens during and following a great war.

Not just the death of so many providers, but the ruining of the land as well as the rotting of the food in the fields and damage by all the chemicals released. This leads to the pale green horse, ridden by, John tells us, Death, with Hell following after.

The rapture has yet to happen, and living is going to be difficult. And the two witnesses are annoying that first horseman.

We will be unaware of the fifth seal because it occurs in heaven, but we'll mention this again later. We will be aware of the sixth seal as a great earthquake that will shake most of the tectonic plates.

The islands as well as the mountains will be moved, and the volcanoes will put so much ash and silt in the air that the sun will not penetrate it, neither will the moon, which will have a red haze much like the sun’s black one.

In this modern world, something called green energy is being pushed. Anything depending on solar energy will be crippled if not completely ineffective with the sixth seal judgment.

All these wind turbines providing power will also become of no use as Revelation 7:1 tells us that the winds

will cease blowing as well. I would guess we're back to crude oil again at this point.

God seals the 144,000 Israelites here. Heaven is awash with praise for God; all those who died the martyr's death from Abel onward will praise the Salvation of the Lord; these countless souls being comforted by the presence of the Lamb.

The seventh seal completes these "seal judgments" by releasing the seven trumpet judgments, and all praise in heaven goes silent for around a half hour.

This is how somber the seven trumpet judgments are. Again, we still haven't been raptured.

Remember the fifth seal, the one occurring only in heaven? That was the prayers of those who were made to suffer and die for Christ's sake wanting to know when they will be avenged.

These prayers are now answered by a gold censer filled with incense and lit by the fire before the altar at God's Throne and cast to the earth, and creation itself is shook with another earthquake and what we would now refer to as a great hurricane, or multiple great hurricanes.

The first trumpet is described as hail, fire, and blood that destroys 1/3 of all trees and all grass.

Remember what trees do besides shed leaves and provide beauty and shade? They clean the air and convert carbon dioxide back into oxygen. That just got crippled.

The second trumpet is described as something like unto a great mountain falling into the sea, and it became blood.

Could this be a biological weapon event? We only know what Revelation tells us, but it does destroy 1/3 of all ships and who knows how many of those will be filled with crude oil? One third of all life in the sea is now dead.

At this point that was probably a major food source that is now taken from us as well. Again, the rapture has still not occurred.

The third trumpet is a meteor falling to earth called Ἄψινθος (ap'·sin·thos), or *bitter*, or *Wormwood*. This ruins one third of all drinkable water and this kills many people because of the water.

The fourth trumpet darkens the sun, moon, and stars. One would think that with everything in the atmosphere, light can no longer penetrate it as well. How much of this is related to the previous two trumpets is unknown, because this is a separate judgment.

These first four trumpets signify that we can't depend on the earth to sustain us anymore either. Again, we are still not raptured.

Between the seal and the trumpet judgments, 144,000 Israelites were sealed; they received the seal of God in their foreheads.

Are these seals visible? We can guess, but we don't know. Christians are sealed and nothing is visible except for the lives we lead.

The fifth trumpet is a hard one to picture and affects anyone without the seal of God in their forehead. It consists of a star (famous or infamous personality?) given the keys to the bottomless pit, and he releases a myriad of demons described as locusts with the sting of a scorpion. Those stung (attacked) will wish to die, but God won't let them.

This goes on for "five months", which could be specifically 150 days, but it might also mean that this isn't perpetual, and will have an end in sight.

The sixth trumpet sounds, and four demons that have been bound in the Euphrates River are released and they spring forth to kill, and they wipe out one third of the planet. They have a defined time as well.

Population control is no longer a problem. Again, no rapture has occurred yet.

The seventh trumpet is the revealing of the antichrist. This will be the Abomination of Desolation spoken of by Daniel, expanded on by Jesus Himself, and explained by Paul.

When antichrist receives a wound that is unto death, he survives, and the world marvels. The false prophet has an image made, a mark is introduced, and those that don't take the mark or worship the image are to be killed.

Only NOW can the rapture occur, but we still don't know exactly when.

What we will miss are the bowl judgments as well as Armageddon.

Conclusion

There are dark days ahead. As soldiers, we've been given access to the details of what we'll be going through.

It would be great if the pre-tribulation belief was right. We'd miss out on at least one more world war, on the planet being basically useless, multiple earthquakes, food shortages and the rampant diseases the surviving food and water will contain.

Why did He tell us about the seal and trumpet judgments if we weren't to be affected by them? He showed us the vial judgments as the answer to the prayers of the saints revealed in the fifth seal judgment.

He could have ended revelation with just the first three chapters if we were going to miss it all. In chapter 20, we read of the final residence of the damned in the lake of fire to show the ultimate ending for those who refuse Him.

Revelation 21 and 22 are there to let us know just how worth it everything is that we are going through, both previous generations and those who go through this time of Jacob's trouble.

But let's say that the pre-tribulationists have it right, and we are wrong. Mid- tribs will have no problem missing everything.

But if the mid-tribulationist is right, how crushed will the pre-trib be?

That is the importance of understanding when the rapture will occur. We can either listen to the warning that Jesus provided, or ignore it. That portion of His word will become void in our hearts.

There are many who throw around the terms “the church” (always in the singular) or “the body of Christ”.

Some consider this as an automatic entry into some fraternal order with all the perks of a secret organization except for the secret handshake.

Do all who get saved automatically become a member in the Fraternal Order of the Universal Assembly?

When was this formed, and who started it? How does one join it if it exists, and how does belonging to it change your eternal destination?

What constitutes a scriptural New Testament church, and is every organization that calls itself a church part of it?

Here we will cover the church’s past: how and when it was formed; its present: who’s part of it as well as who isn’t; we’ll conclude with its future: its final place in glory.

The Simple Forming of the Base

Most people like to think the church had its beginning on the day of Pentecost because many things happened on that day.

The Baptism of the Holy Ghost, fulfilling Christ's promise of a Comforter; 3000 souls were added to the church; and it has a well-defined point in time that can be referenced.

Yet if this is the case, Jesus didn't start the Church, the Holy Spirit did.

Jesus is the Founder; the Holy Spirit is the Administrator. But if it wasn't started on the day of Pentecost, when was it founded?

Matthew 4

> ***18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. 19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. 20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.***

The church (called out assembly) began when the first two members were “called out”. There is no specific day this happened; it was a simple event and nothing can be pointed back toward anything to pinpoint it.

Jesus liked to keep things simple: the emphasis was on the organization He began, not an event surrounding it.

Some will say this is disproved when Jesus made the statement in Matthew:

Matthew 16:18

> ***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.***

We’ll look at a little Greek to prove the foundation of the church is not Peter. Jesus said “ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ” (ep·i tau·tē tē pet·ra) which literally means “on this, the rock”.

"Peter" means "stone", but Christ did not say He was building His church on a stone, or even any rock, but The Rock, or Himself.

When He said “οἰκοδομήσω” (oi·ko·do·mē·sō), He was saying *I will edify* or *I will confirm* or *I will build*.

He finishes His statement, not by saying “Peter’s church” (because if He was building it on Peter, it would be Peter's church) but “My church”, because again, the Rock He was building it on was Himself.

He didn’t promise to start His church: He did that at the very beginning of His public ministry. What He promised to do was to complete it. His church is still being built today.

The Supposed Flock of the Body

Churches are everywhere these days, and that isn't necessarily a good thing. There is a belief out there: a heresy called the universal church.

This is the false belief that once someone is saved, they belong to "the church"; that all that are going to heaven belong to this same church.

So, if you're a Pentecostal, a Church of God, or an Anglican, you're somehow a member of the same church. They claim to have scripture to back this claim up:

Hebrews 12:23

> ***To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,***

Because this is taken out of context, too often this is treated as if it were a salutation; as if this is the beginning of a thought or statement.

They treat it as we would treat the statement: To my wife and best friend. Are we addressing one person or two?

Sure, your wife should be your best friend, but she doesn't have to be.

What needs to be done here is to look at the context: this isn't a salutation but a listing of those people you'll see. Think of this as a census; as a registry. And an accurate registry doesn't go around counting the same people twice.

Begin reading at the previous verse:

> ***22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, 23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.***

We find not one, not even two, but three different groups of people in heaven. The first group we'll cover is the last one mentioned.

Just men made perfect, or complete. This includes men like Job and Enoch of Old Testament faith.

The next gathering we'll examine is the first one mentioned, the πανηγύρει (pan·ē·gyr·ei), or general assembly. This group is comprised of New Testament saints, like the one thief on the cross; he was saved but was never baptized, nor was he ever a part of the New Testament church.

Yet he is here by Jesus' declaration on the cross, proving church membership isn't a requirement for heaven.

Let's elaborate on that word *panēgyrei* for just a moment. This is the only place in scripture that this word appears meaning it is describing something that isn't mentioned anywhere else.

All the epistles recorded in the New Testament were to members of a scriptural New Testament church whether it was to an individual such as Philemon, or to a congregation such as the Philippians.

When the writer of Hebrews recorded Hebrews 12:23, he knew there would be those in heaven during the church age outside of New Testament church membership, including the aforementioned thief.

So, he intentionally used a new phrase “general assembly” to refer to them.

The third group, the smallest in size, is the church of the firstborn. Some might argue "We have proof we're in the body of Christ. Look at how God works through us."

To which scripture says:

Habakkuk 1

5 Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: For I will work a work in your days, Which ye will not believe, though it be told you. 6 For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, Which shall march through the breadth of the land, To possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs.

God can and does us anyone He chooses; some are part of the Body; some are instruments outside of the Body. The fact that you are being used doesn't even reflect your eternal destination, so don't think of that as a proof.

The fact you are used of God should be humbling; don't let it give you a swagger. We all know what follows pride.

With that behind us, how does one tell where they fit? If you're a member of a scriptural New Testament church, that's the church of the firstborn, of course.

If you aren't a member of a church, you're in the general assembly. If you're a member of a church that isn't a scriptural New Testament church, you're in the general assembly.

If the church was universal, why mention the general assembly at all? A "general assembly"" and a "called out assembly' are two mutually exclusive terms.

Some might ask why there is no word "to" between the general assembly and the church of the firstborn. This is confusing because every other set of inhabitants is separated with the word "to".

Why are these two grouped together? That's a good question that has a simple answer. Both of these are citizens of heaven recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life, which is why they are grouped together with the qualifying reason that they are both citizens. "…which are written in heaven", once again proving church membership isn't a requirement for salvation. That cannot be stressed enough.

Let's look at the second scripture they (mis)use:

Colossians 1:18

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

The argument used here is a simple one, and a strong one: one head, one body. No one argues that: it makes sense, and deals with biology the way we understand it.

But not every saved person is part of the body of Christ. Let's examine what Paul says about this body of Christ:

Romans 4

4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: 5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

Let us examine again that little thing we dwell on so much here at International Missionary Baptist Ministries: the context.

We will start and stop with the second question because that is the one ignored here: Who was Paul addressing?

It wasn't Christians in general; this is an epistle to the church at Rome so he is talking to members of a local, visible, New Testament church.

Some might ask, "If all this is true, how did this belief of a universal church come about? Everyone speaks of it as fact. How is this not scriptural if it is so accepted?"

Bro. Joe Roberts has covered the history of the church Christ started in a book he has written, entitled *Church History Through the Trail of Blood*.

In the fourth century, the Roman emperor Constantine was said to have a vision of a flaming cross with the words, “By this you will rule the world."

He reached out to the Christian churches to replace the Roman mythology with the Christian religion but those churches remaining true to the teachings of Jesus said "No", because Jesus wasn’t going to be forced on anyone.

However, some renegade churches saw this as a chance to grow and force their heretical teachings on both the churches that refused to accept them, and the citizens of the Roman Empire as well.

They said “Yes” to Constantine, and with the might of the Roman Empire behind them they spread like wildfire throughout the Empire, squashing those that opposed their teaching.

They referred to themselves as “catholicus ecclesia” or universal church. To them the church was universal, but visible. They were everywhere.

When the Protestant Reformation began, as groups fell away from the Catholics, they continued to embrace this "one universal church" belief because of their catholic roots so they wanted to be part of the one church, but not the Catholic Church. To pull this off they claimed they were still a part of it, but now it was spiritual, not physical, therefore invisible.

As each group broke away, most if not all clung to this belief. Those churches that remained true to Christ's teachings survived in small, constantly persecuted groups.

They never considered themselves part of any universal church, visible or invisible.

The Sensational Future of the Bride

The true church is called His Body here on Earth, but His Bride in Heaven.

Heaven has a capital city: the new Jerusalem.

That capital city will have inhabitants. The throne of God shall be there, so Jesus will live there. Jesus Himself speaks of this "place" in

John 14:2

> ***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 <u>you</u>.***

The current occupants of heaven (at that time) had mansions that were prepared for them. Then what was being prepared for whom?

Did "you" mean He was talking to His disciples as apostles? No more than the Great Commission was given to them as apostles.

He was speaking to them as members of the New Testament church, the church of the firstborn. It did not need to be prepared at this time because it had no inhabitants.

What was He preparing?

The capital of Israel is Jerusalem. The kings of Judah ruled from there in the Davidic dynasty during the kingdom years. The last King will also rule from Jerusalem, but will transition His throne to the new capital that He was preparing to be occupied by His bride: where Jerusalem is the capital of their Promised Land, the new Jerusalem is the capital of the Promised Land of His church.

That local, scriptural, New Testament church He began with the simple phrase "Come, follow Me". The Body has become the Bride:

Revelation 21

9 And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. 10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high

mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11 Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;

All believers go to heaven, but only members of the church of the firstborn, the local scriptural New Testament church will be allowed to live in the new Jerusalem. And we will have His name as well.

Jeremiah 23:6

In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Jeremiah 33:16

In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the

name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our righteousness.

Note: The Old Testament prophets had no concept of a new Jerusalem so both would be spoken of as the same city, unbeknownst to them.

If you aren't a member of a scriptural New Testament church, you are not a citizen of the new Jerusalem. You may visit, of course, but you won't be living there. You are a citizen of heaven, which is never a bad thing.

Heaven has been described as "The most beautiful place God Himself can imagine".

Before anyone believes I'm saying that only Baptists are in the Bride of Christ, let me point out that there are plenty of Baptists who are part of the "general assembly".

There are many without the name of Baptist, who can trace their church origins back to the Church at Jerusalem that Christ started; the church of the firstborn.

Now for the truth that offends.

No one called “Protestant” will be in the Bride of Christ. If they are scripturally saved by grace through faith, they will be citizens of heaven.

No one called “Catholic” will be in the bride of Christ: same caveat.

But you will be in great Company. This John is, of course, the Baptist. We read in

John 3

27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. 28 Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. 29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.

There is no doubt in John's mind that he wasn't a part of the bride, and he was happy with that.

Should you wish to be part of the bride instead of part of the "general assembly" seek out a scriptural New Testament church, and speak to their pastor.

Many a minister has preached on tithing, using the Old Testament patriarchs as examples of pledging ten percent of their increases to God. They do this while reminding us we should be doing this in a cheerful attitude for the right reason.

During Prayer Meeting back in the early 1960s at Sunset Drive Baptist Church, we'd just finished a song when the power went out at the church. Pastor Newcombe laughed and said that this would be the best time to take up an offering.

For a moment, the church was dead quiet as the congregation wasn't too sure how to react. While a few then laughed with him, there were those who seemed to think this was some sort of a threat.

I've read about churches that have launched building projects, and to make sure that the project could be financed, had asked for the membership to make a written commitment to tithing.

This might seem alright to some, but if hardship falls on a member, they were still expected to come up with their offering, because they had committed to it. I don't know what the punishment was if they didn't, but it is things like this that has turned many off to giving to the Lord.

Collections should not be treated as pledging.

Some of these ministers rarely preach from the Old Testament, except when it comes to finances where they forget what Jesus said and instead impart what Moses taught.

In this lesson we'll look at the difference between Old Testament tithing and New Testament collections. This will remind us of another difference between Law and Grace, and how attitude fits into the equation.

Two Biblical Examples on Giving

We all heard or used the phrase “There, but for the grace of God, go I”. It’s the realization that we are all where we are in this moment, not because of anything we’ve done, but due to circumstances we don’t control. It’s also acknowledging that our circumstances can change without warning or reason, and not always for the better. This is both humbling, and should fill us with gratitude for what we have.

It should also allow us to identify with those less fortunate than us. The hand we might be slipping some money into might one day be slipping money into ours. This is a wonderful rule to live by:

Matthew 7:12

> ***¶ Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.***

And yes, there are secularists and atheists who say that living by the Golden Rule covers everything, and is good enough to replace most of our laws.

What many of them don't realize is that the Golden Rule comes from the Bible, specifically the Sermon on the Mount. What this rule pertains to is how we treat our fellow man. There would be less murder, theft, unfaithfulness, and even bullying if the world could only live by this precept.

The Gentile churches put themselves in the place of the poor saints in Jerusalem, and knew what they would hope others would do for them if that were the case. They then acted accordingly.

2 Corinthians 8:14

But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality:

God has always cared for everyone, and this includes His poor. Gleaning was part of the law specifically so that the poor would be provided for. This was the practice of leaving the corners of the fields untouched during harvest, allowing the poor to gather grain for food.

This wasn't a handout: the grain wasn't collected, cleaned, processed, and handed out to the unfortunate; those who needed the gleanings still had to work to get the grain ready to eat.

The best recorded example of this is in the book of Ruth, where Ruth gleaned in the field of Boaz before he became her kinsman redeemer. Despite the fact it isn't witnessed past Ruth, that doesn't mean it stopped after that incident. This was all under Jewish rule.

Under Roman rule that might have changed: if anyone could afford to leave gleanings in their field, they obviously had an overabundance, and the Roman army was a hungry army.

Some of the payments of the properties that were sold and given to the church in Acts were for the poor. At first, the church was small enough that all who were less fortunate were able to get what they needed, but as the church expanded after Pentecost, the poor and the widows were unable to receive their assistances.

This was when the apostles showed how important the poor and widows were to them: They went Old Testament on them.

Numbers 11

16 ¶ And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. 17 And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.

God has never expected the clergy to carry the spiritual and physical needs of His people. Many of us seem like we expect that, but this shouldn't be the case.

The ministry of the church is important: it is its core value and principle. But because caring for the congregation's widows and poor is also important, the office of deacon was created: laity would see to this physical need so clergy could continue with the spiritual needs of the church.

Acts 6

1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. 2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. 3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. 4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. 5 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: 6 Whom they set

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

Giving Under the Law (The Tithe)

The Hebrews were commanded to give a tithe. This wasn't limited to money, but to cattle, fruit and grain, wine and oil, and even their land.

Leviticus 27

And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S: it is holy unto the LORD. 31 And if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof. 32 And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD.

Deuteronomy 14

22 ¶ Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. 23 And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the

firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always.

If we observe what a Jewish tithe was and compare it to what many toss into the collection plate these days, we can see that what we are giving can't even be called a tithe because it doesn't qualify. The New Testament term, what we give, is properly called a collection.

Genesis 28:22

And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.

Giving Under Grace (The Attitude)

Old Testament tithing was part of the law. It wasn't a request, proposal, suggestion, afterthought or wish. It was a commandment. And it wasn't limited to money as we've just read, so it could get expensive.

Of course, if you tithe ten heads of cattle, that means you have ninety to do with as you choose, so you'd think that the more you tithed back then, the richer you had become, so tithing should be easy.

Nowhere are church members commanded to tithe: again, that is part of the Law. But we are stewards, specifically God's stewards. We have been bought with a price, and all that we own is in reality, God's possession which He allows us to hold onto and use as we choose.

2 Corinthians 9:7

Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

God doesn't give us a percentage to work with, He allows us to choose the amount, but because we want to, not because we have to.

Those who choose not to give aren't breaking any commandments, but they are missing great blessings as well as holding back the work of God by not helping to finance it.

Some say Malachi 3:8 doesn't apply as tithes are no longer commanded. Whether or not it does, Malachi 3:10 speaks of God's house, which is one of the references of the church. If He will bless a required offering, how much more a voluntary one?

Malachi 3:10

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

My father used to always say that many church members said they didn't give because they couldn't afford to. He always told them that he gave because he couldn't afford not to.

Giving freely to God is acknowledging His Lordship, our servitude, and our dependence. These are all good things that we should be doing always.

Matthew 10:8

Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

Giving Under Grace (The Promise)

When I was in 1st grade, my teacher had us make something to give to our parents. This was 1966, so times were different, there was no political correctness, and no looking for underlying messages behind simple things.

We were given two pieces of clay: one was a strip and the other a ball. We mashed out the ball as flat as we could with our hands, and then laid the strip around the edge, working the seam together as best we could, then with our fingers we made four rests, and voila! We had an ashtray.

There were many lessons here for us as kids, and none of them had to do with smoking. We learned that any big task is easier if we see things as a series of smaller tasks.

We gained the feeling of accomplishment and pride as we saw something we had made by ourselves. But the biggest thing we learned was how good it felt to give this gift to our parents who, even if they didn't smoke, still treated it as the prize that we thought it was.

And we did this without expecting anything back. There have always been those who give only to receive in reciprocation or to be acknowledged for their gift, but they limit themselves so much when they do this.

Matthew 6:2

Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

We can either give for the glory and awards of man, or for the glory and reward of God. God's rewards are much greater and last so much longer because they carry past the grave.

When we freely give, the feeling we receive is God given. It is the way He has made us because it is the way He is.

Just as we try to give our children things that make them happy as well as making their life fuller, God desires to do this to us, and when we do freely give, He loves to reward us.

And the best part is He has promised to give back to the giver more than the donor gave, a reiteration of Malachi

3:10. We can't out give God, and He challenges us to prove Him wrong.

Luke 6:38

> ***Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.***

Giving Under Grace (The Example)

There are many different views of God's behavior out there. Some see the God of the Old Testament as different from the God of the New Testament. One is viewed as being vindictive, judgmental, and quick to punish, while the other is seen as more loving, compassionate, and forgiving.

The God of the Old Testament is the same God as the God of the New Testament. Yet many picture God the same way Muslims picture the god they refer to as Allah: distant, dispassionate, and more an observer than an interactor with us.

They say this because of all the bad in the world, and they'll say that a loving God wouldn't allow this to happen, so let's first see why this occurs. This is a combination of free will and the three laws of the harvest.

Free will is easy to explain. God isn't withdrawn, but He allows us to make our decisions without His interference, and this right that we have has a caveat, and that is the three laws of the harvest.

The Three Laws of the Harvest

If I were to take a handful of wheat seed and plant it, I would expect my crop to be wheat, because that is what I planted.

Law #1) You reap what you sow. Some think this is the only law.

If I got out the next morning to get my wheat, I will be greatly disappointed, because there will not be a wheat crop waiting on me to reap.

Law #2) You reap later than you sow.

When the crop is indeed ready, I know I planted a handful of seed; if I expect only a handful of wheat, what I find will be overwhelming.

Law #3) You reap greater than you sow.

So many sow tares, and cannot understand why they don't reap wheat. Some knowingly sow tares, and pray for crop failure. Then when all is said and done, they want to blame God for what has happened to them. They do this instead of looking in the mirror or around them at what they as well as their friends and associates are sowing. This gives them a wrong view of God.

God made sin possible by giving us free will. Without free will, we would blindly obey without choice. Free will isn't a bad thing. He did not make Adam sin, but He permitted it. He allows us to live by the laws of the harvest, but He provides a way of escape from the sowing of tares by revealing how to sow wheat instead. And still, He doesn't force this upon us.

He doesn't force salvation upon us either. Although He did make it the simplest act in the world, to simply believe to avoid eternal damnation.

He did this by Jesus leaving His throne, coming here, living a perfect life filled with prophetic proofs of who He was, allowing Himself to be captured, tried, and executed, then raising Himself on the third day.

This was the Greatest gift anyone could give, allowing your One and Only Son to be beaten, spat upon, mocked, shamed, and then to watch Him die while He was screamed at and mocked. All this for people who hated Him.

One wonders who this was tougher on, the Son for all the excruciating pain, or the Father for not wiping out mankind when this happened.

This greatest gift was made possible because of an even greater love for every person who has ever, and will ever, live.

James 1:5

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.

Conclusion

When the collection plate comes around, remember the words of Christ from Matthew 10 verse 8: “Freely ye have received, freely give.”

Simply stated, do not give because you feel obligated to. You are not.

This isn’t an Old Testament commandment written into the law. We aren’t under the law; we are under Grace.

The local New Testament church does have its right to pay its pastor, and its bills; the trustees appreciate this. Its greatest responsibility, however, is to reach the lost, both through this same local church, and its mission work.

It is your voluntary giving that makes you a part of the mission work both here and abroad, and your rewards for this will be greater than what you give: in fact, the greater your gift, the greater your reward.

Do you want to be blessed? Who doesn’t? This promise of God guarantees you a blessing. The operative word here is guarantees. He wants you to prove Him. You’ll never prove Him wrong; you’ll only confirm His promise.

In this study, we are going to look at βάπτισμα (bap·tis·ma) and what scripture says about it; both what it does accomplish, and what it doesn't. We'll also take this time to explain what the word means, but we'll begin by what it doesn't mean.

The word ραντιζω (rhan·tid·zo) or *sprinkling* is mentioned four times in the New Testament, three times in Hebrews and once in 1 Peter; all speak of the sprinkling of blood, not water.

Neither did John εκχεω (ek·khe·oh) or *pour* his followers; he didn't pour water over their head; if that were his method, he'd probably be known as John the Pourer.

The word βάπτισμα comes from the root word βάπτω (bap·to), which means to cover completely with a fluid. You can neither sprinkle or pour on someone and meet this scriptural definition.

In Bro. Joe Roberts' book *Church History Through the Trail of Blood,* we see that the irregular churches considered immersion too inconvenient. So, they went even more unscriptural by both re-defining how baptism was performed, and what its purpose is.

In this study, we'll learn the differences between errant teachings and the unerring Word of God.

Jesus' Example and the Trinity

The entirety of Jesus' life was an example to us. He demonstrated how to overcome temptation, and that fasting is a New Testament teaching as well as an Old Testament one.

As well, His being baptized was His stamp of approval of it. He wasn't baptized as an infant, and He certainly wasn't baptized as a sinner.

John the Baptist set the precedent. "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!" John spoke of Jesus before he met Him. He said Jesus was one whose shoe laches John wasn't worthy to loosen.

When Jesus appeared, he made a wonderful announcement. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

He wasn't even sure that he should baptize Him; he felt unworthy, but Jesus told Him to. The first ordinance of the church had to be established, and Jesus had to be an active participant in both ordinances as an example of their importance.

There are many things Jesus did in His life that we cannot do. We can't be born of a virgin, turn water into wine,

calm the sea, raise the dead, or forgive sins. Only He can do those things. But when He does do something that we can emulate also, it would be wise for us to follow His example.

And the first example we should follow is to be scripturally baptized.

The fact that the Father chose to speak here signifies its importance. But first, we'll begin with what the Father didn't say.

He didn't say "This man is now my Son". The act of baptism doesn't change your standing with God. If you went into the water as a sinner, you will still emerge as a sinner, just a wet one.

Some religions believe that Jesus received a promotion for His baptism; that this was when He became the Son of God. But Jesus has always been the Son of God, just as He has always been God the Son. No one else who was ever baptized has ever been declared a "son of God".

We receive that title when we are saved, not when we are baptized. Baptism is a testimony of our salvation, not a means of it.

It is a requirement for membership in a New Testament church; but being a member of a New Testament church won't get you into heaven either.

The witness of the Trinity occurred at the Jordan River, and was a wonderful validation of Jesus to all who were being baptized that day.

The Spirit descended as a dove, lighting on Jesus after He came up out of the water. Turtle doves were an offering in the temple; Noah used a dove to find out if dry land had appeared after the Great Deluge; doves had a historical and religious significance. As a rule, they didn't land on someone, much less someone soaking wet.

Usually when God speaks, it is the voice of the Son; it is He who is the Word of God. But this time the voice of the Father was heard.

Matthew 3

16 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: 17 And lo a voice from

heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

The Baptisms of the Baptist

John typically baptized out of the river Jordan. It was in the central part of Judaea and was a large river most of the time. It had both political and religious significance. It wasn't the cleanest river in the area, however. Not only was this not "holy water", it wasn't even clean water most of the time. This was the same river that Naaman didn't want to dip in when he went to Elisha to be cured of leprosy back in 2 Kings 5.

There was a time when John went elsewhere to baptize; not for a cleaner source, not for anything whimsical, but for pure necessity.

John 3:23

And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.

When the Jordan wasn't deep enough for immersion during the dry season, John didn't change the ordinance; he changed his location. Immersion was important to John; he baptized as God told him; this wasn't something he learned by watching someone else do it, he got his instructions from God Himself. John didn't feel qualified to change this mode, and he wasn't.

The New Testament church today still uses immersion, the literal definition of baptism. This was how God commanded John to do it and neither John nor the New Testament church ever changed this method. Doing such is a departure of the faith.

Mark 1:5

And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

Baptisms Performed by Jesus

It doesn't take much to cause division in a church. From something as small as 'church decorations vs the second commandment' to something a little less mundane: 'grape juice vs wine' for the Lord's Supper.

The devil likes setting stumbling blocks to cause discord among the brethren. For this cause Jesus made a decision concerning baptism.

He Himself wouldn't baptize; He would have the disciples do it. Though baptism is a testimony, there was the possibility that someone baptized by Jesus would consider their baptism to be superior; they were, after all, baptized by God Himself.

The Baptist baptized to prepare the material for the church, making them qualified for church membership. The disciples were the church and their baptisms were adding to the membership of the church.

Don't forget that the church was fully formed and functional during Jesus' public ministry. There is a false belief that the church was formed on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the congregation that day.

Many like to think that with all the pomp and circumstance that occurred that day that it only makes sense that this would mark the origin of the church.

But Jesus kept things simple. The church began when Jesus called to Andrew and Simon saying “Follow me.”

John the Baptist represented the Old Testament, baptizing those awaiting the Kingdom of Heaven.

The disciples represented the New Testament; those they baptized were part of the New Testament church.

It only makes sense that at some point the disciples would increase their converts over the Baptist’s as his ministry was coming to an end.

John 4

1 ¶ When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, 2 (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,)

The Command to Baptize

Whenever an official decree comes out, it will typically bear the seal of whichever official is giving the pronouncement, explaining and confirming the authority of the administrator of the decree.

Jesus did such a thing at the close of Matthew's gospel. Before He gave them the Great Commission, He reminded them of His final authority.

"All ἐξουσία (ex·o·see·ya) *authority* is given to me in heaven and in earth."

Confirming for both the current generation and all who would follow, Jesus was about to give the marching orders for the church.

The Great Commission is something we take for granted; we've known it our entire lives. But think back to what the disciples did after Christ's crucifixion.

They met in secret, fearing capture and torture or worse. They were scared, and to be honest, we would have been if we had been in their place as well. They lacked leadership, they lacked purpose, and they lacked focus.

After the resurrection, they followed Jesus again, this time probably listening a lot more to what He was saying. Then before His ascension, He told them what they were to do; these orders were perpetual orders spelling out exactly what He wanted the church to do until His return.

Matthew 28

> ***18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.***

During the apostolic age, every service was a Resurrection Sunday service. These were the eyewitnesses to the Event. After the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost, the apostles didn't fear the civil authorities any more.

Adding to their message was those who, besides Christ, were resurrected with Him. This produced many more converts, and these new believers knew where to go.

As the gospel spread across the empire and beyond, new churches were scripturally founded as the apostles followed the Lord's last treatise to them.

They preached the gospel. They preached with conviction wherever they were; synagogues, marketplaces, people's homes, even in prison.

Those that believed, they baptized. This was still immersion as that was the only way they knew to βαπτω, and they did it in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Acts 2

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.
42 ¶ And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Catholics today spritz what they determine to be "holy water" on newborn infants, claiming that this insures they go to heaven when they die. I'm guessing, and I could be wrong, that this makes them a member of their church.

Again, the infant has no say in this, has made no confession, and has no change in their eternal destination. But just for a moment, let's pretend it was that simple. What they believe is that a splash of water drops sends you to heaven.

When the Great Deluge came about in Genesis 7, Noah and his family were saved. But all those outside the ark were unwilling participants to water being splashed in their faces; in fact, as the waters rose and covered the mountains, they were truly covered with a fluid, the literal definition of baptism.

These were the people whom God had judged, yet did His judgment send them to heaven? I think not. Rain is an act of God. Does that mean that even these days when someone is rained on that they are now bound for heaven? They are unwilling participants who've never confessed Jesus as Lord, the same criteria as the newborn infant.

Of course not. Splashing water on someone never changes their destiny. The apostles never spritzed any newborns. Neither did they pour water on anyone. You don't bury a body by tossing a shovelful of dirt on them.

The apostles and their contemporaries followed the example of the Baptist; complete immersion in water of a believer.

Acts 8

36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

The Representation that is Baptism

Baptism is a testimony; it is a symbol of what brought about our salvation, but it does not have anything to do with our salvation.

The thief on the cross was never baptized, yet Jesus said He would see him in paradise. Jesus doesn't lie.

The lowering of the convert in the water symbolizes the death and burial of Jesus, the drawing out symbolizes the resurrection.

This is where sprinkling and pouring lose their purpose. How does splashing water in someone's face depict death, burial, and resurrection? How does pouring?

Unscriptural churches not only alter the mode of baptizing, but they pervert its purpose as well. Baptism has never, and will never, save anyone.

What baptism represents, however, saves anyone who believes.

Romans 6

3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into

his death? 4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

The water used in baptism, contrary to what some teach, can be fresh, salt, purified, sulphur, or even dish water, to symbolize the result of salvation. That dirty Jordon River that John baptized in certainly wasn't Zephyr Hills,

Because baptism is a depiction of something, and every part of it is representative of something as well, let's look at each part of not only just the ordinance of baptism, but the unscriptural replacements for it as well.

The Walk

In the sprinkling of a newborn infant, they are carried up by a parent, who probably holds them for the entire spritzing ceremony. This has no symbolism, but is a necessity as a newborn cannot do it on their own.

In a pouring ceremony the participant walks into the water and typically kneels. The symbolism here is representative of someone who has come to Jesus, and kneels in prayer, and is still alive.

In an immersion, the candidate walks into the water and stands next to the administrator, also symbolizing their coming to Jesus.

The Act

In sprinkling, some “special” water is spritzed into the face of the infant. The child is now wet, but again, there is no symbolism here to talk about.

In pouring, the administrator pours water onto the participant, symbolizing, I presume, the pouring on of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

In immersion, the candidate is held by the administrator, representing the death of Jesus, who lowers them into the water, symbolizing the burial of Christ, and brings them back up out of the water, showing the resurrection of our Savior.

The Exit

The parents of the newborn carry their infant back to their seats. No part of any of this ceremony has symbolized anything; this is quite accurate because all that has occurred is baby's first public bath.

In pouring, the participant stands and leaves, symbolizing a new walk with God.

In immersion, the candidate stands, takes a deep breath, symbolizing that a new life has begun; the water, like Christ's blood, has covered them and cleansed them entirely, and they walk away in newness of life.

The pouring on of water doesn't represent what scripture says it symbolizes. Baptism is about the Son, not the Spirit. It was the Son that bought our salvation; the Spirit convicts us. Just as a reminder:

Romans 6

3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should

walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

We see this symbolism in scripture.

1 Peter 3

20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

21 ¶ The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Please note the three important words at tje beginning of verse 21, “The like figure”. Baptism doesn’t save, what it symbolizes does.

The Purpose of Baptism

There is a certain amount of emphasis placed on baptism in the New Testament. It is something believers should do; before we look at why, let's start off by touching on the wrong reason for baptism.

Salvation in the Old Testament is no different than salvation in the New Testament; it went from believing the Messiah would come and pay the price for our sins to believing the Messiah did come and pay the price for our sins. This is called "faith".

The animal sacrifices covered their sins until the Ultimate Sacrifice cleansed their sins. Baptism is pictured on a few occasions in the Old Testament, but the illustration is a picture of a picture of salvation.

One scripture that causes some confusion with the relationship between salvation and baptism is Mark 16:16 which says "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

He mentioned believing and baptism together to show the order they are to be achieved. Scriptural baptism is believer's baptism. The Lord wasn't making baptism part of

salvation; if He had, the sentence would have ended differently.

Let's look at the three responses that Jesus could have finished the thought with, and what each response would have meant.

He could have said "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes but isn't baptized shall be damned." This would have been supportive of baptism as a requirement of salvation, but then Ephesians 2:8 would be a lie. Also, what of the person in a desert who gains faith in Christ, but water is nowhere around. Does a lack of water prevent an eternity away from the lake of fire? Of course not.

He could have said "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that isn't baptized shall be damned." This removes the entirety of the "faith" aspect and would lead to baptismal regeneration as the method of salvation, meaning Jesus lied on the cross to the thief who was never baptized. It also makes Ephesians 2:9 a lie as well and makes the entirety of the Catholic church redeemed. Neither is true.

What He did say was "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." This statement shows us that it isn't baptism that keeps us out of hell. Instead, it reconfirms that it is belief that

keeps us out of the lake of fire. Meaning it is belief that saves us. And belief, or faith, alone.

So, if baptism has nothing to do with salvation, why should we be baptized?

First, Jesus set the example for us; if baptism wasn't beneath His station, it certainly isn't beneath ours. It also shows that the entirety of the first church, founded during His ministry, consisted of scripturally baptized believers. And that included Jesus.

Baptizing is part of the Great Commission, meaning the church is expected to do this in perpetuity of the church age.

But the best reason to do it, this public display of our obedience to our Savior, is because Jesus commanded it.

1 John 5:3

> ***For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.***

Works of Righteousness

A newborn baby is many things. It is beautiful, it is dependent, it is hungry, it is sleepy, it is playful, it is dazzling, it is the pride and joy of the parents, and it is expensive.

But it is also unrighteous. It is born with a sin nature, and is already dying even while it is in the mother's womb.

This child, as he or she grows, is taught many wonderful lessons by their God-fearing parents. A child's first song should be "Jesus loves me". From a young age, he or she should learn bedtime prayers because God listens to every prayer, saint or sinner; He just moves as He desires to each prayer.

Starting as a baby, church should become a part of their life from early on, learning love for God, respect for others, the Golden Rule, and obedience. But even when he or she does all this, their works are still unrighteous works because they are still unrighteous.

What makes anything a work of righteousness? It begins with Jesus, the Righteous One, living in your heart, which occurs when you are saved. And then it has to be a

good work, something Jesus would do. Telling a lie is never a work of righteousness no matter who tells it.

But something such as scriptural baptism is always a work of righteousness, because the believer is doing something Jesus Himself did.

Matthew 3:15

> ***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.***

Let's take a look at what some of the irregular churches have added to their practices outside of scripture as having something to do with salvation.

As we cover each of these sacraments, we're going to ask the same question to see how it figures into the real overall picture.

When Christ was on the cross, He took the time to address one of the malefactors who asked Jesus to remember

him when He came into His kingdom. Jesus told him "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

We know without the shadow of a doubt that this one thief died and went to heaven; Jesus' own words confirmed this. Some people we might doubt, this one man was a certainty. The question we will ask is "Did the thief on the cross do this?"

The first sacrament is called baptism; that isn't what it is, but that's what it's called. Was the thief on the cross ever baptized? No, he wasn't.

The second is confirmation; a sprinkling with oil and laying on of hands. Was the thief on the cross ever confirmed? No, he wasn't.

Then there is the eucharist; the corruption of the Lord's Supper. By the Catholics' own declaration this completes the initiation of the person. Never was this offered to the thief, but he still went to heaven.

Next is penance; not to be confused with repentance. This is spilling your guts to a priest and the priest absolving you of your sin. Jesus has the power to forgive sin, but no clergy of any religion has that power. Did the thief on the cross do any Hail Mary or Our Fathers? No, he did not.

Extreme Unction is commonly referred to as Last Rites, a ceremony to prepare the person for their passing; I presume this is a “dotting of the I’s and crossing of the T’s” ceremony. Again, the thief on the cross went through none of this.

We’ll skip over “Holy Orders” and “Matrimony”. Moving past the sacraments, there are those who believe that all you must do to get into heaven is to do more good than evil while here, and you’re good to go.

The good works theory is busted in Ephesians 2:8-10. And also by the thief on the cross, who had no time for either good works, or works of righteousness.

Titus 3:5

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

Qualifications for Baptism

A scriptural candidate for baptism is one who has realized that they are a sinner; that there is nothing they can do within themselves to change that fact. They acknowledge they deserve hell, but don't wish to go there; that Jesus died for them so that they don't have to.

They've repented of their sin, and asked Jesus to save them from the hell they deserve. No newborn infant has ever done this.

This is the first of four requirements for Scriptural Baptism, a scriptural candidate

Second, it has to have scriptural authority, which is the local New Testament church.

Third, it must have a scriptural administrator, someone appointed by the church to carry out the ordinance.

Lastly, it must have a scriptural mode; enough water to submerge the candidate into.

The lack of any single one of these requirements renders the baptism unscriptural. Again, baptism never saves; that was not its intention; it is a personal testimony that the candidate has chosen to follow Jesus.

The local New Testament church has but two ordinances. The first, baptism, came about at the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

The second, the Lord's Supper, came at the end of it.

Neither can, together or separate, save anyone. They both point to our Savior. If you believe your salvation is or was dependent on either of these services, please ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins and come into your heart.

Then you are eligible for a scriptural baptism.

This church ordinance has been known by multiple designations, it has one term given to it in scripture, but has been called by various names, serving various purposes, with various elements involved.

Many denominations consider a corruption of this ordinance as a sacrament: a means of grace, considering it a necessary part of salvation.

The ordinance that the New Testament churches use is observed with unleavened bread and grape juice, and some denominations use this as well; others use leavened bread or wine as one of the ingredients.

Some see the Lord's Supper as purely symbolic while some teach transubstantiation: that the bread and wine become actual body and blood of Christ.

As we look at each point, we will try to examine the different beliefs of the Catholics, near-Catholics, Protestants, and Baptists; we will see what the scriptures say about it, recognizing the scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

The Last Supper is the First Supper

All major denominations recognize that the Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper with the third cup of the Passover.

Luke 22

> ***18 For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. 19 And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.***

The Lord's Supper was delivered as an ordinance to the New Testament churches. Had it been delivered to the apostles as apostles, it would have died with them, and Paul would not have had to explain to the church at Corinth what they were doing wrong.

1 Corinthians 11

23 ¶ For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: 24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

The Purpose of the Lord's Supper

Anyone who thinks sacraments play a part in their salvation is calling Jesus a liar. Why are they calling Him that?

As Jesus was paying the price for our sins on the cross, His sixth recorded cry from the cross was a proclamation. He said "Τετέλεσται".(te·te·les·tai) This phrase is translated as "It is finished" and is present tense, not future. The verb of the phrase, τέλεω (ta·leh·o), can be translated as *ended, completed, executed, discharged* as a debt would be, *accomplished, done, fulfilled,* or *paid.*

A sacrament is saying Jesus was wrong: that it wasn't finished; we have more to do, and something to do, with our salvation.

The need of a sacrament is to say Jesus didn't pay it all: that the God who is our Creator, who formed the trillions of stars and knows them each by name, didn't live up to His name, The Salvation of the LORD.

A sacrament says that what Jesus couldn't do, we can. Can you imagine anything more outrageous or maniacal? How full of themselves can anyone be?

How can any work we do compare in value to the lifeblood of God the Son? How can anyone believe that if the Father wasn't satisfied with the sacrifice of His One and Only Son that some ritualistic ceremony that we do can carry any weight?

Because it doesn't. Sacraments never have, and never will. So, what purpose does the Lord's Supper serve? To remember His sacrifice for us: His death.

1 Corinthians 11

> ***24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.***

One would believe that if it were more than a memorial, Christ would have chosen His words better. This would be an omission, and our Lord never misspoke. And it was in remembrance of Him, nothing He said made it an act

concerning ourselves. If it was for our benefit, He would have made a blunt and frank comment concerning this.

Qualifications For the Lord's Supper

At the establishment of the Lord's Supper, the attendees had been reduced by one as Judas had gone to report to the scribes and Pharisees: Jesus had said "What thou doest, do quickly."

Of those left, Jesus included, all were baptized believers. The question becomes, was this a coincidence, or was it by design?

As this started off as a Passover service, anyone could have been in attendance. Typically, Passover was done as a family, and any in that household was included.

But this wasn't done in whatever the typical dining room was, this was in an "upper room", segregated from the family who lived in that house. It could have easily included them, as was tradition, but this Passover was different, and would redefine Passover.

That night, tradition tells that they didn't do all four of the cups of Passover; Jesus changed it when they got to the third cup, the cup of Redemption.

He said "this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Interestingly, they didn't complete the Passover that night, the fourth cup, the cup of Acceptance, was never poured.

It was this change in the Passover, the shifting of it into the Lord's Supper, that made it necessary for only the baptized believers there to partake of it.

We had a case years ago in our church where one of the members suggested to our Women's Auxiliary that he would like to become the director of the church.

Our deacon, his father-in-law, would have been, or should have been, the one to nip this in the bud, for many reasons. When members seek change in a church, and it isn't a radical or doctrinal change, there are proper ways to go about it. Churches are a democracy: bring it up in business meeting, let the members vote, and live with the results.

If you don't like the outcome or can't live with said results, it's probably time to find another church. If you continue beating a dead horse, hoping to sway others to your viewpoint, expect to be forced to find another church.

Until that happens, if you continue to cause problems or take away from church unity, you definitely shouldn't expect to be able to partake in the Lord's Supper.

2 Thessalonians 3:6

> ***¶ Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.***

Church discipline, if enacted properly, would prevent those of bad moral character from partaking of the Lord's Supper, or of even maintaining church membership.

Catholics and their "cousins" give this as a sacrament; if some attendee beats his wife, but admits it in confession, performs his "hail Mary" or "our Father" readings and whatnot, he is considered in good standing, and can partake.

Some denominations will put up with someone like that, saying "that is between God and them, who are we to

judge?" If you are claiming to be scripturally saved, scripture says that "we", who will one day judge the world as well as angels, are the ones to rectify this situation.

That is one of the many fallacies with "confession". Besides the fact that you should confess these things to God, and not to someone who wears a collar as a symbol of their ministry, let's see why this doesn't work.

The priest and the sinner are veiled to remain anonymous. No real counselling can come of this if eye-to-eye contact can't occur.

No clergy of any religion can ever absolve anyone of sin. Only God has this ability, and even the Pharisees, who were wrong on a lot of things in the gospels, got this right.

And what does Jesus say about repeating the same prayer over and over again?

Matthew 6:7

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

When someone thinks that uttering a few "hail Mary" or "our Father" poems indefinitely carry any weight with God, they are wrong.

If only Jesus had told us how to deal with the sins in our own lives.

Luke 13

1 There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? 3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Living in sin but confessing to the wrong source without repenting of your actions, neither changes your standing with God or clears the record of your wrongdoings.

Nor does it make you make you eligible to partake of the Lord's Supper. However, if you confess to the only One who can forgive your sins, and repent of those actions, you can partake of His Supper.

1 Corinthians 5:11

But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

The reason that a closed communion has been established is to restrict those who participate in it. If some are partaking of it as an ordinance, some as a sacrament, and some as nothing more than food and drink, where is the unity?

As overseer of the local church, the bishop answers for how he has led his flock; not for the lives they lead, but for the doctrines he has taught them, and any counseling he's offered.

When Christ established that first Lord's Supper, it would have been easy for others besides the apostles to be in attendance. They were in a houseful of other people; whether or not they were believers, they weren't invited.

Jesus purposefully (He never did anything without a reason or teaching or doctrine behind it) left it to members of His church, even making sure Judas wasn't there by dismissing him before they reached that part of the Passover.

A local church can verify the beliefs of the members, but those outside of this local flock, even from another church of like faith and practice, are not permitted to partake of this Supper with this particular flock. They have their own church to attend, and are expected to partake of the Supper there.

Remember though, that just because you are a member doesn't mean that you are automatically qualified to partake of the Lord's Supper. There are other stipulations as well.

Hebrews 13

9 Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. 10 We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.

If a member only attends the two holiday services a year, Resurrection Sunday and Christmas; or comes once every few weeks or so (not counting for medical reasons) they should not be permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper.

The original attendees were the ones who followed Jesus everywhere; they were faithful in attendance. Yes, there were other members by this time, and no, there weren't church bulletins advertising meeting times, but those faithful and surrendered to Him were there.

John 6

63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. 64 But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. 65 And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. 66 From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. 67 Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? 68 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

Jesus had many disciples, but those who left of their own will weren't able to partake of this Supper. There were true believers among them, the scriptures confirm this, but when they left fellowship with Jesus and His apostles, the local New Testament church, they were no longer eligible to be part of His Supper.

Acts 2

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

42 ¶ And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Should partakers be able to understand the ceremony, that it isn't just a meal, that the ingredients are representative of something special? Remember that this ordinance began as part of Passover. Jesus was a kosher Jew, and He would have selected a kosher site for this event.

Passover has a higher level of kosher than typical. What was different about this time of year?

Exodus 12

14 And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.

15 Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.

During Passover, leaven was representative of sin; this is why it, in every form they were expected to שְׁבַּת or rid leaven out of their houses.

Leaven, or yeast, is the difference between wine and grape juice. Wine would have been thrown out of a kosher house for Passover.

The church at Corinth was not discerning the Lord's body and blood; it had become a feast to them; they might not have understood the 'Unleavened Bread' part, but they got the 'Feast of' from the name, and went with that.

When the Lord's Supper is scripturally observed, we are taking part in the Passover. This was described by God Himself as an ordinance forever, so it is still an ordinance, just a supper, not a feast.

In a church service, we are as they were told to be in Exodus 12:11, "… with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste".

'In haste' means this isn't a party event: this isn't a feast. It is a solemn supper partaken of soberly, not as a banquet, buffet, or social gathering. Notice how the Passover tone changed when Jesus announced "This is My body …"

1 Corinthians 11

27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. 29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

As we've stated when we spoke of the other ordinance, believer's baptism, there are many things Jesus did that we cannot: He is God, and we certainly are not.

But when He does something that we can do, we are most wise to emulate Him as much as is humanly possible. He was a participant in both ordinances He established, and because nothing He did was an accident, let's take a look at what He made sure happened, and imitate this as well.

The original church was divided into two groups: Jesus knew this as well as Judas, but the others were unaware of this division. The two groups were "those who would betray Jesus" and "those that wouldn't". Before the Lord began this ordinance, He rid the church of this first group, leaving a united church.

Again, this was no accident; He expects us to follow this example. A house divided against itself cannot stand, and if heresy has crept in, it must be taken care of right away.

Like an infection, it will spread throughout the whole body. One reason we have so many denominations today is because false doctrines weren't nipped in the bud fast enough.

Apologetics have been here since Bible times; Paul was a wonderful apologetic, and it is his writings that so many of us base ours on, and rightfully so.

When a false doctrine is first heard, don't just make fun of it and kick someone out of the church. Disprove it to them. This means learning God's Word. We ought to all be apologists to at least some certain degree.

A church should be united in doctrine, and if they aren't, they need to study God's Word and pray about what they are studying. A divided church will not last, and must fix their problems before observing the Lord's Supper.

1 Corinthians 11

16 But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

17 ¶ Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. 18 For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. 19 For there must be also

heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. 20 When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper.

Growing up in the 60s and 70s, I was a part of the Schoolhouse Rock generation. Those of us who grew up with this learned science, American history, math, and grammar through songs.

We were taught the difference between an adjective and an adverb: both can modify other adjectives and adverbs, but adjectives modify nouns, and adverbs modify verbs.

There is an adverb in scripture that is wrongly treated as an adjective by more than a few.

That word is ἀναξίως (an·áx·i·os) or unworthily and is confused with ἀνάξιος (same pronunciation, but spelt differently) or unworthy. That small difference is actually a big difference.

In the phrase "if you partake of the Supper unworthy", the word 'unworthy' is modifying the word you. And to be honest, because the bread and fruit of the vine

represent Christ, we are all unworthy. But this is not what is being said.

When it is "if you partake of the Supper unworthily", we see that the modifier 'unworthily' points to the word partake.

This lets us know that there are disqualifiers for those taking part in the Lord's Supper. And these disqualifiers may not all be public knowledge.

This is why we are to examine ourselves, to make sure that we both willingly and rightly participating in this service. Again, this isn't the phrase unworthy: we are to partake for the right reason and having the right standing in the church.

1 Corinthians 11:28

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

We Are Judges

Many believers consider John 3:16 to be their favorite scripture, it is the Who and What of the Bible. Secularists as well as atheists can usually quote two words of the sacred scriptures.

"Judge not" (They can't quote the chapter and verse as a rule). To properly understand κρίνω μὴ,(kri·no me) we must remember who He was and wasn't talking to, and look at the meanings of the word 'judge'.

When we see someone walking down the street all tattooed up, unkempt, shoeless, and some kind of can or bottle in their hand, it's easy to jump to conclusions about them.

That's judging, and that is what Jesus was speaking against. We aren't to prejudge: the root word of prejudice. We aren't to condemn, decide, try, or punish someone by our own mental implications.

Are we to judge sin? Yes, we are. Otherwise, how do we correct bad behavior if we can't point it out? We don't judge the sinner, however, that's the Lord's duty.

When a non-believer is corrected, they typically take it personally, even when it's called "constructive criticism".

They have been taught by the world that right and wrong are subject to your personal view, and that what is right or wrong differs between individuals.

Those who are truly saved recognize that God has determined for us what is right and what is wrong, and when we point out an error, we are trying t do them a service.

If you tell a fellow believer when he or she is doing wrong, it should be done out of love. A holier-than-thou attitude will have the wrong effect on both them and you.

A church has the right to call sin just what it is; we are in the forgiving business and should always remember that.

1 Corinthians 5:12

For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?

Conclusion

Partaking of the Lord's Supper will never save you. If it had that power, Jesus would have mentioned it.

It isn't a time of fellowshipping or feasting, but of solemn reflection of all that He did for us. It was important to Jesus, and so should be important to us.

How often should we have it? Some churches do it weekly, but the Bible doesn't lay out a particular day to have it.

It isn't the timing or the frequency that is important, it's the reason that is.

Respect the ordinance; Paul didn't glaze over what the Corinthians were doing wrong, and he thought enough to set them straight. It is this correction that we derive much of what we know concerning what we shouldn't be doing concerning the Supper.

And don't shrug off the self-examination. Those things others don't know about us, God does. And we will answer to Him one day, even concerning this.

1 Corinthians 11

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. 29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

If God takes it this seriously, we better be doing the same.