

# MESSENGER

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FULFILL YOUR DESTINY

Autumn 2021

The Way of Peace

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The Path to Salvation -- Part 3

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Is Christmas Really Christian?

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# MESSENGER Magazine

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The world desperately needs peace. The Bible confirms that there is a way of life that is referred to as the way of peace. Yet few know the way of peace. Certainly the world, with its chaos, confusion, strife, and conflict, is not at peace. And the Bible confirms that most do not know or follow the way of peace. The way of peace, however, is revealed in the Bible. In this edition are discussed specific actions you can take to walk in the way of peace. Also in this edition, the final installment in our series on "The Path to Salvation." And, in unwrapping the "Christmas" custom, do we find that its traditions conform to how the Bible defines Christianity?

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# The Path To Salvation -- Part 3

by Rod Reynolds

The Bible teaches that God has a plan of salvation for mankind. What does that mean, and why is a plan of salvation necessary? What is it that human beings need to be saved from? If there is a "plan of salvation," what is it? Are there specific steps to be followed on the path to salvation?

In previous articles, parts 1 and 2 of a series, I addressed the first seven of the following questions relating to salvation for human beings:

(1) What is "salvation"?; (2) Are "good" people saved even if they don't know about Christ, or are unbelievers?; (3) Are infants and babies saved, even though they know nothing of Christ and lack the capacity to choose good or evil?; (4) Does the Bible teach "Universal Salvation"?; (5) Who qualifies you for salvation?; (6) Can one, after making a profession of faith in Christ, and receiving the Holy Spirit, be disqualified from salvation?; (7) Are those who do not attain salvation in this age eternally condemned?; (8) What is the path to salvation?

In this article, part 3 of this series, we conclude the final question: "What is the path to salvation?"

The Scriptures do reveal a definite path to salvation. And as with any path there are steps along the way that are necessary to get you to the final destination. As pointed out in part 2 of this series, it is God who qualifies us for salvation, not we ourselves, as we repent in faith and are baptized and receive the Holy Spirit. But having been qualified, we must remain qualified, as we will see. There is an initial stage of salvation, where we stand before God as cleansed, and no longer guilty in his eyes. But salvation is also a process, that has multiple stages, or steps.

To repeat: Ultimate and final salvation is a process, it is a path we must follow. So what is the path?

(1) First, to have salvation one must **hear the gospel**. By using the term "hear" the gospel, we also include learning of the gospel by the printed word. Whether you hear it with your ears, or read it, you are getting the same message. But without the gospel, the message of the gospel, the know-

ledge contained in the gospel, one cannot be saved.

"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!'" (Romans 10:14-15).

"So then **faith comes by hearing**, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

As we will explore further as we proceed, faith is essential to salvation, but without hearing there is no faith. Hearing is a first and necessary step in the process of salvation.

Jesus came preaching a message. As he did he trained others to continue on after his death to preach the same message. Then after his resurrection, he appeared to them with the following instructions: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).



Note that they were sent to preach, or proclaim a message to the entire world. The hearing of the gospel message is essential to the process of salvation because it is through that message that vital information necessary for salvation is taught.

Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus:

“This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their **understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them**, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you **have heard Him and have been taught by Him**, as the truth is in Jesus” (Ephesians 4: 17-21).

Note that after the word is proclaimed people who receive it and act on it in faith are added to the body of believers, that is, those who are enrolled in heaven as part of the Church of God, whose names are written in the book of life.

“However, many of those who **heard the word believed**; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (Acts 4:4).

We see again in Acts 10, how Peter was sent to bring the message of salvation to a group of Gentiles:

“So Cornelius [a Centurion, an officer in the Roman army] said [to Peter], ‘Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God. Send therefore to

Joppa and call Simon here, whose surname is Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea. When he comes, **he will speak to you.**’ So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, **to hear all the things commanded you by God.**’ Then Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ – He is Lord of all – **that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea**, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree. Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And **He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify** that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins. While **Peter was still speaking these words**, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word” (Acts 10:30-44).

Note that the message Peter brought, which added to knowledge of the Scriptures the people in the audience had already gained, led to their conversion.

Note how this is characterized in the next chapter: “Now the apostles and

brethren who were in Judea **heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God**” (Acts 11:1).

They had to hear, to be exposed to the word of God, the gospel message, in order to receive it.

“Of His own will He brought us forth [generated us spiritually] **by the word of truth**, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures (James 1:18).

The word of God is at the foundation of our spiritual regeneration, of our salvation.

John wrote: “... that which we have seen and heard **we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us**; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

So the **first step** on the path of salvation is **hearing the word of God**. God himself has initiated and sustains this effort to communicate the message of salvation to mankind. God is the source of the message, and he is the one who manages its communication to the world.

But, just hearing not enough.

(2) When one hears the message, for it to bear fruit in terms of salvation for the one who hears, **he must believe**. What is it that he must believe? He must believe the testimony of the Scripture, which is what the gospel is, in its largest sense. And he must believe not only the message, but he must **believe in the one** who is the source of the message, the one in whose hands is life and death, salvation or destruction.

“**In Him** you also trusted, **after you heard the word of truth**, the **gospel of your salvation**; **in whom also, having believed**, you were sealed with



the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13).

"... as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because **when you received the word of God** which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, **the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe**" (1 Thessalonians 2:11-13).

Israel in the wilderness **heard the same gospel**, but they **did not believe** it, so they failed in their calling, and were denied entrance into the promised land, which is a type of the kingdom of God.

"For who, **having heard**, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they **would not enter His rest**, but to those who **did not obey**? So we see that they could not enter in **because of unbelief**" (Hebrews 3:16-19).

"For indeed the gospel was preached to us **as well as to them**; but **the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith** in those who heard it" (Hebrews 4:2).

Faith is a gift, but to receive that gift requires a heart and mind ready and willing to receive it. Upon hearing the message, believing or rejecting it is a decision the hearer makes. It is a matter of what one chooses to do with the word that is spoken, or communicated.

That doesn't make it any less a gift. If

someone is offering you a gift, you can accept it or reject it. It works that way with pretty much any kind of gift. And that's the way it is with faith. When God sends the message, he is offering with it the gift of faith, but it's up to each individual whether to believe or not believe.

If faith is a gift, which it is, but if there is no choice in the matter, why doesn't God give everyone faith? If humans have no free will, no choice in the matter, and some are given faith and others are not, then God is a respecter of persons. Yet, we are assured, "There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, no partiality..." (II Chronicles 19:7). "For there is no partiality with God" (Romans 2:11).

A gift can be accepted or refused. The gospel can be rejected or believed. If you choose to believe, and God grants you faith ("from faith to faith") as a result of your belief, it's no less a gift.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for **everyone who believes**, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed **from faith to faith**; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'" (Romans 1:16-17).

To one who has a ready mind to believe, God grants the faith necessary for salvation. But if one's mind is hardened, and refuses to believe, he cuts himself off from being able to receive the gift God holds out to him.

"Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were **more fair-minded** than those in Thessalonica, in that they **received the word with all readiness**, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

**Therefore many of them believed**, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men" (Acts 17:10-12).

Note that the willingness to receive the word with a ready mind, a willingness to consider and search out the truth of it, led to saving faith, for many in Berea.

On the other hand, when Paul preached the gospel to a group of Jews, along with Gentiles, in Antioch of Pisidia (western Asia Minor, in what is today Turkey), many of the Jews rejected it out of envy:

"On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with **envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul**. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the **word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it**, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles'" (Acts 13:44-46).

"But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one **believes unto righteousness**, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame'" (Romans 10:8-11).

But the confession spoken of is not and the faith spoken of here is not an empty and fruitless, superficial confession and belief, but a **belief unto righteousness**. A belief, or faith, which **leads to profound changes in**



## how one thinks and lives his life!

(3) The next step on the path to salvation is repentance.

"Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. **Repent, and believe in the gospel**'" (Mark 1:14-15).

What did Jesus mean, when he commanded the hearers of the message to repent?

Some claim repentance is a change of mind, but not a change of behavior. That it does not mean that one must quit sinning.

Note the following from an article "The Woeful Curse Of Lordship Salvation" (David J. Stewart, [www.jesusi-sprecious.org](http://www.jesusi-sprecious.org)): "There is a woeful heresy which has crept into many churches today, teaching that carnal believers are not saved. The heresy is called 'Lordship Salvation,' which says that in order to be saved a person must forsake sinful behavior...."

"...the damnable heresy of LORDSHIP SALVATION has infiltrated many religious groups and is leading multitudes into Hell."

"Again, Lordship Salvation is the unbiblical teaching that a person MUST cease from a sinful lifestyle to be saved. Lordship Salvationists pervert the true meaning of the word "REPENT" in the Word of God. Whereas Biblical *repentance* simply means "to change one's mind," Lordship Salvationists corrupt the meaning of the word, teaching that a person must cease from living a sinful lifestyle to be saved."

"All we have to do to be saved is to receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ as payment for our sins. The "Gos-

pel" (Good News) is that Christ DIED on the cross for our sins, He was BURIED, and then bodily RESURRECTED three days later (1st Corinthians 15:1-4). Simply BELIEVE the Gospel and the work is done!"

"The Greek word for 'repentance'... is 'METANOIA' and literally means 'a change of mind.' Not a change of lifestyle; BUT, a change of mind."

"I have read many Gospel tracts that give the impression that a person MUST forsake their sins to be saved, which is NOT true at all. A person DOES need to repent to be saved, but the ONLY repentance which God requires of a man to be saved is for that man to acknowledge his sinful condition and recognize his desperate need for a Savior...."

The statements quoted above represent a common belief among many professing churches. Is it any wonder that so many people who profess to be Christians live lives little different from others around them who make no such profession?

How does the Bible itself actually define repentance? Does repentance mean one just undergoes a "change of mind" to accept Jesus as savior, but there is no requirement to change his behavior?

It is true that the Greek word for repentance means to change one's mind. The Greek word for repentance, *μετάνοια*, (*metanoia*) comes from a verb, *metanoéoō*, which means to think differently. But what does that imply, from a Scriptural perspective?

"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'" (Matthew 3:1).

"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his

baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance**, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore **every tree which does not bear good fruit** is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:7-12).

The implication of this is that **if one does not bear the fruits of repentance, he has not truly repented**. It does indeed involve a change of mind, but **if you undergo a genuine change of mind, your behavior will change with it**.

"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. **These are the things which defile a man**" (Matthew 15:19-20).

Those who teach that repentance does not involve forsaking sins, select a few Scriptures from the Bible and then pervert them to teach a damnable doctrine that deceives people into a false conversion. It takes them on a path that will never lead to salvation.

"He who covers his sins will not prosper, But **whoever confesses and forsakes them** will have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

Paul described his mission to King Agrippa (ruler of Palestine): "...but [I]



declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and **do works befitting repentance**" (Acts 26:20).

We find the **Bible's definition of repentance** stated in Ezekiel 18, among other places:

"Again, when a wicked man **turns away from the wickedness which he committed, and does what is lawful and right**, he preserves himself alive. Because he **considers and turns away from all the transgressions which he committed**, he shall surely live; he shall not die. Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not fair.' O house of Israel, is it not My ways which are fair, and your ways which are not fair? Therefore **I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways**,' says the Lord God. '**Repent, and turn from all your transgressions**, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. **Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed**, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,' says the Lord God, '**Therefore turn and live!**'" (Ezekiel 18:27-32).

"But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, **did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts**" (Revelation 9:20-21).

So we see that repentance, from the Bible's perspective, very definitely means a change of lifestyle. It means acting on your belief, confessing your

sins and and turning from sin.

The next step on the path to salvation is:

(4) Baptism.

"And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. **He who believes and is baptized will be saved**; but he who does not believe will be condemned'" (Mark 16:15-16).

Baptism is an outward confession of your faith and repentance. It implies that you become a new creature, that you enter into a newness of life in Christ, having died to your sins.

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! **How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?** Or do you not know that as many of us as **were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?** Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also **should walk in newness of life**. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that **we should no longer be slaves of sin**" (Romans 6:1-6).

We have an article available titled "Should You Be Baptized?," which goes into much greater detail concerning baptism.

The next step on the path to salvation is:

(5) Receive the Holy Spirit.

When Peter and others preached in

the Temple on the day of Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection, some who were there were convicted, and we read:

"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said to them, '**Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**'" (Acts 2:37-38).

The Spirit of God is given to those who repent, and thus are committed to obedience to God's word, his laws.

"Turn at my rebuke; Surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you" (Proverbs 23:23).

When Peter spoke to Jewish leaders in the early days of the Church, he spoke to them of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, and said to them: "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom [which] God has given [better translated "gives"] to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32).

Obedience to God's laws, his commandments, involves an act of will, coupled with the power of God's Spirit. Humans have will, and choice, and God holds humans accountable for their choices and their behavior.

If obedience is without any effort or choice on our part, but simply the working of God without any act of will on our part, what justification is there for God to punish sin? But even though we must choose to do what God requires of us, to follow through and actually accomplish it requires the help of God's Spirit, which he makes available to us, as we seek it.

"If you then, being evil, know how to



give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13).

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, **who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.** For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, **that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.** For those who live according to the flesh **set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.** For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:1-6).

(6) After hearing, believing, repenting, being baptized, and receiving the Holy Spirit, we have been forgiven of our sins, and God has qualified us for salvation. But for final salvation **we must continue to bring forth the fruits of righteousness (overcoming the flesh, the world, Satan)**

"As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, **'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed'**" (John 8:30-31).

Jesus said to his disciples: **"Abide in Me, and I in you.** As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. **If anyone does not abide in Me, he is**

**cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned"** (John 15:4-6).

"I say then: **Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.** For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, **that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16-25).

"For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (Galatians 6:8).

(7) In addition to the above, to attain final salvation we must **endure to the end.**

"And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—**if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard,** which was preached to every creature under

heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister" (Colossians 1:21-23).

"Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. **Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.** And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life" (1 John 2:23-25).

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, **holding fast the word of life,** so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain" (Philippians 2:12-16).

In the Olivet prophecy Jesus foretold many things that would happen leading up to the end of the age. He said, "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. **But he who endures to the end shall be saved**" (Matthew 24:12-13).

Here we've rehearsed seven steps to salvation. Of course, this is a bare outline, and many more details could be discussed. The steps are: (1) Hear God's word; (2) Believe the gospel; (3) Repent; (4) Be baptized; (5) Receive the Holy Spirit; (6) Bring forth fruits of righteousness; (7) Endure to the end.

**You would do well to remember these, study them thoroughly, and walk the path to salvation.**

# The Way of Peace

by Rod Reynolds



Shortly after John the Baptist was born, his father, Zacharias, who was a priest, prophesied of his mission. Among other things, Zacharias prophesied of John the Baptist, that he would: "...go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways" (Luke 1:76).

.....

"To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:79).

Yet, although the world desperately needs peace, the world does not know the way of peace.

We find the following rebuke in a prophecy applying to our age: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But **your iniquities have separated you from your God**; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.

For your hands are defiled with blood, And your fingers with iniquity; Your lips have spoken lies, Your tongue has muttered perversity. No one calls for justice, Nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity. They hatch vipers' eggs and weave the spider's

web; He who eats of their eggs dies, And from that which is crushed a viper breaks out. Their webs will not become garments, Nor will they cover themselves with their works; Their works are works of iniquity, And the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, And they make haste to shed innocent blood; Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; Wasting and destruction are in their paths. **The way of peace they have not known**, And there is no justice in their ways; They have made themselves crooked paths; **Whoever takes that way shall not know peace**" (Isaiah 59:1-8).



That this prophecy applies to both Jews and other Israelite peoples, and Gentiles, in other words, the world in general, is made plain in the book of Romans. Paul wrote: "For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks [or Gentiles, non-Jews, cf. Romans 3:19, 29; or non-Israelites, cf. Romans 11:25] that they are all under sin" (Romans 3:9).

Then Paul quotes from or paraphrases various Scriptures to make his point. Including the following: "Destruction and misery are in their ways; And **the way of peace they have not known**" (Romans 3:16-17).

The Bible makes it plain that there is a **way of life** that is referred to as **the way of peace**. Yet, few know the way of peace. Certainly the world, with its chaos, confusion, strife and conflict, is not at peace. And the Bible confirms that most do not know or follow the way of peace.

Yet, as a prophet of God, it was John's mission, in part, "To guide our feet into **the way of peace**" (Luke 1:79). When John began his public ministry: "... he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight."'"" (Luke 3:3-4).

The Church of God shares the mission to prepare the way for God's kingdom through the preaching of the gospel. We also preach repentance, and the remission of sins, and it is our duty to follow the way of peace, and to lead others into that way of peace by our example, as well as by what we proclaim.

Christ's true disciples are called to be the "light of the world." "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so

shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5: 14-16).

But how many, who profess to be Christians, know what is the way of peace? Do we understand the way of peace? Are we living the way of peace?

The way of peace is revealed in the Bible. Examined in this article are ten facets of the way of peace, or ten specific behaviors you can practice to walk in the way of peace.

The first in the series of actions you can take to follow the way of peace is:

#### (1) **Follow the laws of God.**

You won't have lasting peace until you learn to obey God. The people of Israel were promised peace if they would obey God's laws. "If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them....

.....

"I will **give peace** in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land" (Leviticus 26:3, 6).

The law of God when applied in our lives tends to result in peace: "My son, **do not forget my law**, But let your heart keep my commands; **For length of days and long life And peace they will add to you**" ( Proverbs 3:1-2).

"**Great peace have those who love Your law**, And nothing causes them to stumble" (Psalm 119:165).

#### (2) **Contend for the faith.**

Ironical as it may seem, walking the way of peace requires, in this world, that we contend for the faith. Note how Jude connects peace with contending for the faith: "Mercy, **peace**, and love be multiplied to you. Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to **contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all deliv-**

**red to the saints**" (Jude 1:2-3).

We are in a world which is hostile to the truth, and hostile to those who proclaim or seek to live by the truth of God's word.

We are engaged in spiritual warfare to win the battle for peace within ourselves, and in the world at large. The only way to peace is for us to engage and defeat our enemies in this spiritual war. Who are our enemies? First it is ourselves; our own carnal nature we must overcome.

"For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Romans 7:22-23).

The other "law" that Paul speaks of warring against our desire to please God is the law of sin, bound up in our carnal or fleshly nature. The fact is the fleshly mind, of itself, is enmity against the law of God and is not in submission to God's commandments.

"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Romans 8:7).

Yet, our efforts to follow God, coupled with the Holy Spirit, can enable us to overcome our own carnality. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).

"For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if **by the Spirit** you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13).

Another enemy is the world, or the spiritual forces that shape the world. I want to emphasize that ours is not carnal warfare, but spiritual, and our weapons are not weapons of carnal warfare, like guns and bullets, but spiritual weapons, such as truth, the gospel of peace, faith, etc. (cf. Ephesians 6:11-18).

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For **we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places**" (Ephesians 6:10-12).

Enemies of the truth are to be found not only in the world at large, but the Church itself has repeatedly over the ages been subverted from within by those who seek to take it in a path that is contrary to the path of truth. "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:4).

"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber" (2 Peter 2:1-3).

So walking in the way of peace requires that we be diligent and resourceful in overcoming with God's help, and watchful that we do not become victims of deception as we contend for the faith.

### (3) **Love other people, including your brethren in the Church, and even your enemies.**

Although the world is at enmity with God and with his people, we are to love God, and love other people, including our brethren, and our enemies as well. And we are to seek to live at peace with them, within the parame-

ters of God's word.

"Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets"' (Matthew 22:35-40).

"A new commandment I give to you, that you **love one another**; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

"This is My commandment, that you **love one another** as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another. If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:12-18).

"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but **through love serve one another**. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' **But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!**" (Galatians 5:13-15).

"And let us consider one another in order to **stir up love and good**

**works**" (Hebrews 10:24).

"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, **love one another fervently with a pure heart**" (1 Peter 1:22).

"And above all things **have fervent love for one another**, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins.' Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:8-10).

In addition to loving one another, and our neighbors, we are to love our enemies.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, **love your enemies**, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:43-48).

"Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but **overcome evil with good**" (Romans 12:17-21).

(4) **Submit to government** (but not to the point of disobeying God's laws).



An important key to peace is learning to submit to lawful authority. This includes especially God's government, or rule over your affairs, but also government in the world and in the Church, though both may be flawed due to the flawed character of men.

By obeying lawful authority, you benefit from the potential rewards of doing so, and you may avoid being subject to the penalties meted out to lawbreakers. I once knew a couple who had decided fairly early in life that they were not going to file tax returns or pay taxes. As the years went on they lived increasingly in fear of being caught, and were deprived of many of the advantages they might have availed themselves of if they had paid their taxes, such as owning property. They were deprived of much of the peace they might have enjoyed had they respected the law and yielded to the governing authorities.

During the prohibition era in the United States, bootlegging and associated illegal activities became commonplace and highly profitable. Granted the attempt to criminalize the manufacture and distribution of alcoholic beverages was misguided, and proved to be unworkable. Drunkenness is a sin, but consuming alcoholic beverages in moderation is not (Romans 13:13; I Corinthians 5:11; 6:10; Deuteronomy 14:26).

Criminal gangs, seizing the opportunity, took the place of what had been legitimate, tax paying distilleries and breweries. Gangsters fought over turf, and some were killed in gang wars. Al Capone, a gang leader in Chicago, became famous. Openly admitting that he was a bootlegger, and suspected of numerous other crimes, including murder, he seemingly was above the law.

But his crime career came to an end at the age of thirty-one, in 1931, when he was sentenced to eleven years in federal prison for income tax evasion. After serving seven and a half years

he was released. But his health had been ruined by syphilis, and he died in 1947.

To many, lawlessness seems to pay, and by no means are all lawbreakers—including corrupt political leaders—in this age of man brought to justice. The seeming injustice that often prevails is highlighted in a psalm as follows: “For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; Violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; They have more than heart could wish. They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; They speak loftily” (Psalms 73:3-8).

The psalmist comments further: “When **I thought how to understand this**, It was too painful for me—Until I went into the sanctuary of God; **Then I understood their end**” (Psalms 73:16-17). In the sanctuary, the Temple, portions of various sacrifices, or in some cases, the entirety, **were burned up** (Exodus 29:18; Leviticus 9:12-14).

So it is with the wicked, unless they repent. “But the wicked shall perish; And the enemies of the Lord, Like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. **Into smoke they shall vanish away**” (Psalms 37:20). The ultimate fate of those who persist in refusing to yield to God and his laws, is to be **burned up in the lake of fire**.

“For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” Says the Lord of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed

calves. You shall trample the wicked, **For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet** On the day that I do this,” Says the Lord of hosts. “Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments” (Malachi 4:1-4; cf. Revelation 21:8).

“Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, **that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence**. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior” (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for **he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil**. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor” (Romans 13:1-7).

“Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those **who are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers and for the praise of those who do good**. For this is the will of

God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (1 Peter 2:13-17).

Concerning government in the Church, Peter wrote: “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for **they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account.** Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you. Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner. Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. And I appeal to you, brethren, bear with the word of exhortation, for I have written to you in few words” (Hebrews 13:17-22).

The idea is that government and order, for the benefit of the governed, is of Divine origin. No earthly power exists except such as is permitted by God (cf. John 19:11). It does not mean that God necessarily approves of the actions of those in authority. Many Scriptures condemn the evil and oppressive actions of unjust rulers. But Christians are enjoined to submit to human government so long as such submission does not hinder their obedience to the laws of God himself.

In all cases, when there is a conflict between the clear requirements of God's word, and the requirements human authority may lay upon us, we must **obey God rather than men.** When the apostles were commanded by the government in Jerusalem not to

preach the gospel, they said: “**We ought to obey God rather than men**” (Acts 5:29).

#### (5) **Honor one another.**

By giving honor to others we promote tranquility and peace.

“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, **in honor giving preference to one another**” (Romans 12:10).

If everyone did this it would preclude many if not all of the disputes and feuds that occur between people. Being a self-promoter is something that is not pleasing to God.

“But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. **For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted**” (Luke 14:10-11).

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind **let each esteem others better than himself.** Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

In marriage, both husbands and wives should give honor to one another:

“Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed

Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, **giving honor to the wife**, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered. Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For ‘He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil!’” (1 Peter 3:1-12).

#### (6) **Endure trials patiently.**

Trials are a part of life. If we are to be at peace we must learn to endure patiently whatever life throws at us, even as we do our best to live our lives in a godly and industrious way.

Sometimes trials are allowed to chasten us. When that is the case, we are admonished: “And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.’ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days



chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:5-11).

Trials, however, occur to all people, some more than others, and not infrequently, through no fault of the person who suffers. Yet, even in such circumstances, we are called upon to exercise patience: For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But **when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called**, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:19-21).

"And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But **even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed**. 'And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.' But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evil-doers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. **For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil**" (1 Peter 3:13-17).

"Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.' Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant;

because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 5:5-11).

Whatever suffering we have to endure, in comparison with eternity, is but for a short time. "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. **For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory**, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

#### (7) Do not envy.

The disciples of Jesus sometimes exhibited jealousy and covetousness. Jealousy and envy destroy peace among brethren, and eventually destroy the brethren. The same principle applies to entire nations.

"Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, 'What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?' But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all'" (Mark 9:33-35).

"Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other." (Mark 9:50, NET).

"Who is wise and understanding

among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where **envy and self-seeking exist**, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:13-18).

#### (8) Control your tongue.

Often peace and tranquility is disturbed by an unruly tongue.

"An ungodly man digs up evil, And it is on his lips like a burning fire. A perverse man sows strife, And a whisperer separates the best of friends" (Proverbs 16:27-28).

"Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; And where there is no talebearer, strife ceases. As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife" (Proverbs 26:20-21).

"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. **For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man**, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! **And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity**. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of

beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so" (James 3:1-10).

As James says, anyone who has perfected control over his tongue, who never stumbles in anything he says, is a perfect man. I dare say none of us has attained such perfection. But with God's help each one of us ought to strive for perfection in the things he or she says. Seek perfection in the use of your tongue.

John Gill in his commentary on verse 8 wrote: "No man can, by his own power and strength, tame or subdue his tongue, or restrain it from evils it is habituated to, be it lying, cursing, swearing, or what else: God, by his Spirit, power, and grace, can, and often does, change the note of the curser, swearer, liar, and blasphemer; but no man can do this, though he can tame beasts, birds, serpents, and fishes; which shows the tongue to be worse than anything to be found in the whole compass of nature".

"The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, But the lips of a fool shall swallow him up" (Ecclesiastes 10:12).

"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6).

We are instructed to avoid foolish disputes:

"Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife" (2 Timothy 2:22-23).

We should reflect on and evaluate the things we say. Are our words edifying?

Are they the truth? Do we engage in slander, gossip and lies? Sound speech is vital to peace.

**(9) Be diligent in your own business and don't meddle in other people's business.**

Peace is disturbed when someone meddles in the affairs of someone else inappropriately.

"But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, **to mind your own business**, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing" (1 Thessalonians 4:9-12).

"For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all" (2 Thessalonians 3:11-16).

Verse 11 in the ISV reads: "We hear that some of you are living in idleness. You are not busy working—you are busy interfering in other people's lives!" (2 Thessalonians 3:11).

"Impertinent meddlers with other people's business" (*Adam Clarke's Commentary*).

**(10) Exercise forbearance.**

"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy

and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, **longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another**, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful" (Colossians 3:12-15).

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, **with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love**, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1-3).

"Bearing' (or forbearing — KJV) ἀνέχομαι (*anéchomai*) middle voice from 303 and 2192; to hold oneself up against, i.e. (figuratively) put up with: — bear with, endure, forbear, suffer" (*Strong's Concordance* lexicon).

Be patient in enduring the perceived faults of one another, and "put up with" one another, without gossiping, slandering, spitefulness, backbiting, etc.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

In this article we've examined ten actions that can help us walk in the way of peace. They are: Follow the laws of God; Contend for the faith; Love other people, including your brethren, and your enemies; Submit to government (but not to the point of disobeying God's laws); Honor one another; Endure trials patiently; Do not envy; Control your tongue; Be diligent in your own business and don't meddle in other people's business; Exercise forbearance.

Being diligent in applying these principles in our own lives can help each of us make significant progress in following the way of peace.



# IS CHRISTMAS REALLY CHRISTIAN?

by Rod Reynolds



Every year in December we see in the U.S.A. and other parts of the world trees adorned with garlands and lights, and ubiquitous images of a fat, jolly old man in a red suit.

Christmas is ostensibly observed to honor and worship Jesus Christ and God. I remember seeing one year near Christmas a group of singers in a shopping mall with a sign saying "Jesus is the reason for the season." But few seem to stop and ask themselves, "Is this how Christ would have me worship him?"

## God Of Truth

God in his word characterizes himself as a God of truth (Deuteronomy 32:4). His Spirit which he sends forth to dwell in his people is called "the Spirit of truth" (John 16:13). During this time

of year we have among us in the world what is called the "Christmas spirit." Is the Christmas spirit a spirit of truth?

God demands that we must worship him in truth (John 4:23-24). Is keeping Christmas worshiping God in truth? Is Christmas Really Christian?

Some years ago I had a brief conversation with a young woman who told me in effect that if for no other reason Christmas should be kept for the children, because they delight in it so much.

What is it that children are being taught to delight in? Keep in mind that we find in I John 2:21 the statement "that no lie is of the truth." Yet, millions of parents are telling their children a lie—that Santa Claus rewards them if

they are good. James wrote that every good gift comes from God (James 1:17). But parents are telling their children not that God is the giver and provider of their blessings but that Santa Claus—whom the parents likely consider to be a fictitious character—is the one to whom the children should look for rewards.

Not only are children being taught to believe a lie, and, by example, that lying is acceptable, but Santa Claus also in the minds of many children displaces God. Santa Claus, not Jesus Christ, is the one chiefly on the minds of children at this time of year. Santa Claus is pictured not only as an all knowing judge and rewarder of good, but as a timeless, eternal being with magical powers. In other words,

Santa Claus is a counterfeit of God.

God tells us in his word what we are to be teaching our children, and it's not lies about "Santa Claus." Rather, we are to teach children to love God, and keep his commandments (Deuteronomy 6:5-7). One of the laws which we are told to teach our children is, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Deuteronomy 5:20). Or, as Paul wrote, "Do not lie to one another" (Colossians 3:9).

### **Where Did The "Santa Claus" Idea Come From?**

The figure Santa Claus is a confused amalgamation of myths from many sources. One series of legends revolve around a Catholic bishop of the city of Myra in Asia Minor. Revered as the patron of children, the weak, the poor, slaves, sailors, travelers, merchants, seaports and the Russian empire, Nicholas was allegedly born in the 3rd or 4th century A.D. Legend has it that he stood up in a tub on the day of his birth, clasped his hands, looked to heaven and thanked God for bringing him into the world (*The Story of Santa Klaus*, William S. Walsh, Gale Research Company, Detroit, 1970, p. 18). If this story were true, of course, he was arguably the most precocious child ever born.

Later, on his way to visit the tomb of Jesus, it's said that a storm broke which threatened to wreck the ship on which Nicholas was a passenger. He bade the sailors to be of good cheer, prayed and the storm calmed. It's believed that he healed children by making the sign of the cross over them, heard prayers made to him from hundreds of miles, and that even after his death he continued to hear and answer prayers. In the church at Bari in Italy water trickles out through the rocks which form the traditional tomb of Nicolas. It is collected by priests and bottled, then sold under the name "manna of Saint Nicholas" as a cure-all (*ibid.*, pp. 18-19, 21, 26, 30-45).

But don't get the idea that the Santa

Claus legend dates back only to the fourth century A.D. Many of the pictures of this St. Nicholas have the same face and features of the god Saturn worshiped by the Romans (*ibid.*, p. 70). The Roman Church has a long history of adopting pagan gods and renaming them Christian saints.

The fourth century witnessed explosive growth in what the world calls "Christianity." But at the same time heresy and apostasy flourished even more among those nominally Christian than it had in previous centuries.

In writing of this period historian Wallace K. Ferguson writes: "The easy conversion of those who were merely following the line of least resistance or of personal advantage signified no very vital change in their method of life or in their thought. They clung stubbornly to ancient superstitions, translating them into terms of the new religion. The cult of a host of saints and martyrs sprang up to take the place of the many local gods of pagan mythology" (*A Survey of European Civilization*, third edition, pp. 91-92). For example, the Egyptian "god" Osiris was now called by the Catholic name Saint Onephris. Similarly, the worship of other "gods" and "goddesses" was incorporated into "Christianity." Artemis was renamed St. Artemidos, Dionysus—St. Dionysus, Apollo—St. Apollinaris, Bacchus—St. Bacchus, and even Saturn was canonized as St. Satur, and on it goes.

Nicolas in Greek means conqueror or destroyer of people. The Roman god Saturn was the equivalent of the Greek god Cronus. Cronus means the "horned one." The horn is an ancient symbol of power and dominance, used as such even in the Bible (e.g., Deuteronomy 33:17). So horned one is equivalent to mighty one, or ruler, which is equivalent to Nicolas, the victorious or conqueror. Thus Saturn, Cronus, Nicholas are different names for the same deity. So "Santa Claus," short for Saint Nicholas, is simply Saturn in disguise.

The customs of the original pagan gods were also preserved and adapted into the nominally Christian religion. "Most of the Christmas customs now prevailing in Europe, or recorded from former times, are not genuine Christian customs, but heathen customs which have been absorbed or tolerated by the church" ('Christmas customs,' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, James Hastings, vol 3, p. 608).

Saturnalia was a festival in honor of Saturn observed near the same season of year—the winter solstice—as Christmas is observed today. "The saturnalia in Rome provided the model for most of the merry customs of the Christmas time" (*ibid.*, p. 609). It was a time of drunkenness, revelry and licentiousness. People exchanged gifts. Wax candles were lit in honor of Saturn. Dolls were offered to him—a relic of an even more ancient tradition of human sacrifice. These same traditions have continued in the celebration of Christmas.

William Walsh describes how the revelries of saturnalia continued in the Christmas tradition, "The wild revels, indeed, of the Christmas period in olden times almost stagger belief. No amount of drunkenness, no blasphemy, no obscenity was frowned upon. License was carried to the utmost limits of licentiousness" (*The Story of Santa Klaus*, p. 75).

Saturn and St. Nicholas were stern, austere figures, older looking with white beard and hair. Santa Claus in some countries still looks that way. In the United States he is a fat, frivolous, merry character. The Greeks had a festival at the same time of year in honor of Bacchus or Dionysus. The representative god of the festival was Silenus—the tutor of Bacchus. "He was the most jovial of tipplers. His outlook was as rosy as his nose. A cheery laugh beamed over his large, fat face. The light of humor twinkled in his beady eyes. His rotund stomach spoke of good cheer. His smile beamed



assurance of an unruffled disposition" (*The Story of Santa Klaus*, pp. 71-72). He was surrounded by satyrs—woodland spirits or demons—as St. Nick by elves.

We might ask how did Santa Claus get mixed up with Christmas? The answer is he was always there, because Christmas is a pagan custom featuring pagan false gods with the name of Christ attached.

This fact is widely documented, and such documentation is not hard to find. Many people see no harm in borrowing pagan customs and calling them Christian. But what does God say about using man's traditions to worship him? (Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Matthew 15:8-9).

Christmas is celebrated in the name of Jesus Christ. But the doctrine and the tradition is a lie. No lie is of the truth. Obviously, then, observing Christmas is not compatible with worshiping God in spirit and in truth.

#### **How Did Christmas Come To Be Called Christian?**

Let's take a closer look at history to see if we can discover how and when Christmas was adopted into nominal Christianity. The Bible does not reveal the date of Christ's birth, nor that of any other person. We are commanded in Scripture to observe and remember Christ's death, not his birthday (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). The birthday of Christ was not celebrated in the New Testament Church he founded. The birthday custom itself is firmly rooted in idolatry and superstition. Even two or more centuries after the time of Christ Christians commonly "...considered birthday festivities to be survivals of heretical practice. The Greek and Roman birthday feasts were looked upon as pagan orgies" (*The Lore of Birthdays*, Ralph and Adelin Linton, p. 42).

Clement, writing between 193 and 211, dated Christ's birth at November 18, 3 B.C., but acknowledged that there was no general agreement as to

this date. Referring to evidence from Clement's writings, the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* says: "The remarkable point in this evidence is that it shows no trace of Dec. 25 as the date of the nativity, and connects Jan. 6 as the feast of the baptism only with a gnostic sect..." ('Christmas,' vol. 3, p. 601).

Many of the earliest writers who discuss the date of Christ's birth suggest it was in the late summer or early fall. Several of the early professing Christian writers (second and third centuries) preferred a spring date for the birth of Christ. At the same time the early writings have a strong tendency to equate Jesus with the sun and with the solar year. During this time the popularity of the eastern mystery religions was spreading into the west.

"For the majority of the people of the empire, the vacuum left by the decay of classical paganism was filled by the mystery religions, which had spread through the Hellenistic east during the three centuries before Christ and which began to penetrate the west in the last years of the Roman republic.

.....

"By the third century, they were the dominant religious force in the west as well as in the east. The most important of the mystery religions were those of the "Great Mother" (Magna Mater) from Asia minor, of Isis from Egypt, and of Mithra from Persia.

.....

The cult of Mithra included a baptismal rite, the eating of a sacred meal of bread and wine which identified the devotee with the savior god, and the celebration of the birthday of Mithra on the twenty-fifth of December, the date on which the lengthening day announced the rebirth of the sun" (*A Survey of European Civilization*, Ferguson, p. 84).

Isis was worshiped in the western Roman Empire as part of a trinitarian cult including also Horus and Serapis.

Horus, the son of Isis, was considered the reincarnation of the sun god. His birthday had long been celebrated at the time of the winter solstice. Serapis is a shortened form of the compound of Osiris-Apis. Osiris was the leading deity, hero-martyr god of the Egyptians. He was god of the underworld, or realm of the dead, and was represented as a young bull or calf. Apis was a mystical name for the slain Osiris, the legendary father of Horus, often identified in mythology with the sun.

Mithra was also a sun god. Mithra was represented as a god of light who fought against darkness. Mithraism had several superficial similarities with Christianity, and even more similarities with the popular apostate Christianity which had abandoned the Sabbath for Sunday, and whose adherents were already participating in the saturnalia, brumalia and other pagan feasts long before they were officially adapted into the Church.

Tertullian, considered a father of the professing Church, wrote about 230 A.D., "By us who are strangers to Sabbaths, and new moons, and festivals, once acceptable to God, the Saturnalia, the feasts of January, the Brumalia, and Matronalia, are now frequented; gifts are carried to and fro, new year's day presents are made with din, and sports and banquets are celebrated with uproar; oh, how much more faithful are the heathen to their religion, who take special care to adopt no solemnity from the Christians" (*De Idolatria*, chapter 14).

In order to gain and hold adherents the professing Church, especially after it gained official status in the fourth century, embraced the popular customs. "There can be little doubt that the church was anxious to distract the attention of Christians from the old heathen feast days by celebrating Christian festivals on the same days" (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 'Christmas,' vol. 3, p. 607).

Christmas does not appear in the lists of legal holidays of the Christianized Roman Empire under Valentinianus (389), Theodosius (438) or Alaric (506). But it is included in the Justinian code of 534. However, a regulation forbidding performances in theaters and circuses on Sunday was extended to Christmas, Easter and epiphany in 400.

The evidence indicates that Christmas was not observed as a Christian festival until the fourth century. Evidence indicates that it was originally observed on January 6, but was changed to December 25 in 354 by pope Liberius. The influence of Mithraism, and solar worship in general, in the eventual adoption of Christmas is evidenced by the fact that many Christian writers, among them Chrysostom, Ambrosius and Augustine, make use of the coincidence of Christmas with the unconquered sun, or the new sun. Identifying Jesus Christ with the sun served as a justification for celebrating his birthday on the ancient birthday of various sun gods—the winter solstice or thereabouts. "...the 'solar' argument is the only one which is found in early Christian literature to account for Dec. 25" (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 'Christmas,' vol. 3, p. 607).

The adoption of Christmas simply follows the pattern found in a multitude of other customs and observances of the professing Church. Namely, adopt popular religious customs and call them Christian. Of course, if possible, attempt to give them a biblical explanation, as Chrysostom did with Christmas. But of his attempt to justify Christmas from the Bible it is said: "...the whole explanation is posterior to the institution of the feast, and was invented to prove, from the gospels, a date which had already been chosen for other reasons" (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 'Christmas,' vol. 3, p. 607).

"Although ...the date of Christmas had been fixed upon as December 25 the-

re is no biblical reason why this should be so.

.....

"... the fixing of the date as December 25th was a compromise with paganism" (*The Story of Santa Klaus*, p. 62).

Although many see no harm in blending pagan customs and forms with the worship of the God of the Bible, or of Jesus Christ, the practice is a denial and violation of God's word.

### Israel's Example

The pagan worship with which Israel and Judah defiled themselves took various forms, but most often it was a syncretized worship that blended the use of God's names, such as El or Yahweh, with the names, symbols and traditions associated with heathen gods. When the Israelites made a golden calf (resembling the Egyptian *Apis*) to worship in the wilderness while Moses was in the mountain receiving the law, they said of their idol, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" (Exodus 32:4). Then Aaron, after building an altar before the idol, proclaimed, "Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD [Yahweh]" (Exodus 32:5). God was not impressed. At first he was inclined to destroy the whole nation. But relenting upon the plea of Moses, God, nevertheless, promised to punish them for this sin and sent a plague upon them (Exodus 32:9-14, 34-35).

During their trek through the wilderness Israel also blended the worship of God with that of other false gods, such as Moloch and Remphan (Acts 7:42-43). Remphan is a transliteration of the Hebrew *Chuin* or *Kewan*, an ancient Semitic name for Saturn. Moloch (also called Molech, Milcom, Malcham, Malik, Molk, etc.) is the Saturn of Romans, also known by the name Baal-Hammon and the Greek name Kronos (*Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, Green, p. 182). As we've seen, Saturn later morphed

into Saint Nicholas. "...the Saint Nicholas of Southern France and Germany... [is] grave, sedate, severe, preserves more of the Saturn than the Silenus type. He is Saturn christainized and dignified with episcopal robes. He distributes gifts like our Santa Klaus, but in addition to gifts for good little boys and girls, he carries a birch-rod for bad ones. In the more primitive sections, such as certain parts of Lorraine, the Tyrol, Bohemia and so on, he is attended by an evil spirit called Ruprecht who looks after bad boys and girls" (*The Story of Santa Klaus*, pp. 76-79).

Later in Israel's history, around 930 B.C., Jeroboam, King of Israel, made two similar golden calves, associating them also with Yahweh, the Eternal One, who brought Israel out of Egypt (1 Kings 12:28). Ostraca (pottery remnants) bearing the name Egelyau have been found in Samaria. The name is a compound of 'egel (calf, or young bull) and yau (a shortened form of Yahweh), "thus supporting evidence from other sources that in northern Israel the calf was a Yahweh symbol..." (*Documents from Old Testament Times*, D. Winton Thomas, ed., p. 206). "...the cult of Yahweh with bull-images at Bethel and Dan may have borrowed much from the cult of Baal, whose cult animal was the bull" (*Archaeology and the Old Testament World*, John Gray, p. 118). The Israelites claimed to worship the Eternal God, Yahweh, but blended his name with the symbols and worship of idols, gods of their own imaginations.

Among the Jews who fled from Egypt near the time of the Babylonian captivity were some who settled in Elephantine, Egypt. There a temple was built for the burning of incense and offering of meal offerings. Papyri texts from the area confirm that the Jews in Elephantine continued the apostate, syncretistic religious practices that resulted in the destruction of their homeland. Alongside Yahu (a variation of Yahweh), the texts indicate other dei-



ties were worshiped.

Bethel (God's house) is found hyphenated with the names of pagan deities, including Anath. And Anath, the name of a Canaanite goddess, is also found hyphenated with Yahu (*ibid.*, p. 257). "Anath is often associated with Athtart (later Hebrew Ashtoreth, Greek Astarte). Both are renowned for their beauty, and both are closely associated with **Baal**" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, CD-Rom edition, 1998). Anath was "the most active goddess in the fertility-cult, in Palestine, and at Bethshan [about 25 miles northeast of Samaria, in the Jordan valley] in one of the five Late Bronze Age temples a basalt panel was found with a dedication in Egyptian hieroglyphics to 'Antit, Queen of Heaven and Mistress of the Gods'" (*Archaeology and the Old Testament World*, Gray, p. 118).

Through Jeremiah God warned the people of Judah not to flee to Egypt (Jeremiah 42:44). God pronounced punishment on the Jews who fled to Egypt, saying, "...you provoke Me to wrath with the works of your hands, burning incense to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have gone to dwell..." (Jeremiah 44:8). Notably those who dwelt in "Pathros," derived from Egyptian and meaning region of the south, refused to give up their syncretistic worship, including the worship of the "queen of heaven" (Jeremiah 44:15-19). Elephantine was a city in the southern region, Upper Egypt.

The temple there, which should have never been built in the first place, was destroyed in 410 B.C. by the Egyptians. And the Jewish colony there soon after disappeared from the pages of history, in partial fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah 44:11-14, 27-29.

We've already discussed how the professing Church blended pagan customs and forms with the nominal worship of Christ. Using idolatrous customs and practices and calling it Christianity is not acceptable to God. Idolatry is a major reason for end time

punishment.

Many of the prophecies of the Bible are to have a dual fulfillment, and others pertain exclusively to the end of this age. The message of the book of Ezekiel was intended primarily for the people of Israel, for example (Ezekiel 2:3). But Israel had already been sent into a national captivity more than a hundred years before Ezekiel's prophecies were written. Ezekiel himself was a captive in Babylon when he prophesied (Ezekiel 1:1). His prophecies are primarily for the end of this age, and are fully relevant to the times we're living in today.

Moreover, God is no respecter of persons, and we can expect him to have the same view toward sins committed in our age, as in ancient times (Malachi 3:6; Romans 2:11; Colossians 3:25; Hebrews 13:8).

Major reasons God sent ancient Israel into captivity, as he had warned for generations, were Sabbath breaking and idolatry. These same warnings apply at the end of this age, as well (Ezekiel 20:23-24. Jeremiah 16:14-18. Isaiah 2:5-6. 8-9, 17-22. Revelation 9:20-21).

Genuine Christians are to have come out of idolatry (1 Thessalonians 1:9. 1 Peter 4:3-4). We are warned, if we desire to be in God's kingdom, to be among his people, to separate ourselves from idolatrous practices (1 Corinthians 6:9; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18).

Using the ancient Israelites as an example, the Bible warns, "... do not become idolaters ..." (1 Corinthians 10:6-7). How did some of the Israelites become idolaters? "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play" (1 Corinthians 10:7). Partaking of idolatrous feasts, knowingly eating foods dedicated to such worship, is forbidden to Christians (1 Corinthians 10:14, 21; Acts 15:29; Revelation 2:14, 20; see "May Christians Eat Food Offered to Idols?" at [cogmessenger.org](http://cogmessenger.org), a condensed version of the same article is included in this

issue of *Messenger* magazine).

Nicolas means "conqueror of the people," essentially the same meaning as Kronos, Moloch and Baal. Satan has conquered and deceived the world largely through enticing them into idol worship, as Baalim did under Satan's influence. Christmas is a manifestation of ancient Baal worship, and it represents a system of lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:7; Matthew 7:21-23).

While they may seem innocent to most, idolatrous customs such as Christmas lie at the root of evil and lawlessness, man's way as opposed to God's. The deceitful manner in which they appeal to the human senses, the power with which they grip the emotions of multitudes, make them powerful tools of deception for Satan and his minions. It's amazing how easily people can be blinded by such things as a little tinsel, colorful lights, trees adorned with trinkets, and fanciful tales of a man in a red suit.

But idolatrous worship cuts us off from God (Ezekiel 8:16-18; Ezekiel 14:3-11). Such worship, based on human devised tradition and the commandments of men, is vain (Mark 7:6-9, 13).

We are admonished in the Bible to worship God according to his word, not according to the dictates of our own hearts (Jeremiah 13:7, 10; 9:12-16).

Moreover, covetousness permeates much of the activity associated with Christmas. The Santa Claus lie teaches and encourages covetousness, which itself is a form of idolatry, and is condemned (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5-6).

Be spiritually aware. This world is given to idols. We must keep ourselves from them, as the apostle John wrote, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

# May Christians Eat Food Offered to Idols?



by Rod Reynolds

**Surely Christians in our modern age need not be concerned with the question of eating or not eating food sacrificed to idols. Or should they? While seeking to obey God's word, may Christians eat food offered to idols? Does the New Testament really teach what some have supposed about this question?**

Isn't it interesting that the first sin of mankind involved the eating of food forbidden to them? (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:11-13). The tree in the Garden of Eden represented the knowledge—or better understood the designation—of good and evil. It represented mankind usurping God's prerogative as the One Lawgiver (James 4:12), deciding for themselves right and wrong, good and evil. By eating with Satan (he was the first rebel—the first to partake of the forbidden fruit) they yielded to his influence and control. In effect they sacrificed to him, while cutting themselves off from subjection to God and his Spirit (Genesis 3:8, 22-24; 1 Corinthians 10:21). Have we now become so "wise" that we can partake of Satan's table without sharing in his evil?

God's Word condemns idolatry. In the first three of the ten commandments God condemns in various ways the worship of false gods (Exodus 20:3-7). The other commandments all relate in principle to various aspects of idolatry, as well. There are scores of Scriptures directly expressing God's displeasure with idol worship and practices asso-

ciated with it, including eating of food offered to idols.

God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, "He who sacrifices to any god, except to the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed" (Exodus 22:20). To prevent the sacrifice of animals to demons among the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness, God told them they were to kill at the door of the tabernacle all domestic animals slaughtered for food (Leviticus 17:3-9). "To root out this idolatrous custom [dedicating slain animals to false gods] from among the Israelites, they were commanded to slay every [domestic] animal before the tabernacle, as a sacrificial gift to Jehovah, and to bring the slain-offerings, which they would have slain in the open field, to the priest at the tabernacle, as *shelamim* (praise-offerings and thank-offerings), that he might sprinkle the blood upon the altar, and burn the fat as a sweet-smelling savour for Jehovah (see Lev. 3:2-5)" (*Commentary on the Old Testament*, Keil and Delitzsch, on Leviticus 17:3-7). When Israel entered the land God had promised this law was amended to permit the slaughter of domestic animals for food wherever convenient, but all sacrifices were to be killed at the altar of God where he had placed his name (Deuteronomy 12:20-28). Implicit in these laws is a prohibition against **eating food sacrificed to idols**.

Israel was drawn into idolatry at Mount Peor in part by eating sacrifices to false gods. "They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods" (Numbers 25:2-3). "They joined themselves also to Baal of Peor, And ate sacrifices made to the dead. Thus they provoked Him to anger with their deeds..." (Psalm 106:28-29). The Scriptures express God's displeasure at this and other examples of partaking of such sacrifices (Exodus 32:4-10; Jeremiah 7:18; Isaiah 66:17; 1 Corinthians 10:5-7; Revelation 2:14-16, 20-22; et al.).

God told the Israelites they were to destroy the places of false worship in the land, along with the altars, pillars, and images of false gods (Exodus 34:13; Deuteronomy 12:1-4). "You shall not worship the Lord your God with such things," said God (Deuteronomy 12:4). They were not to ally themselves with idolaters and were warned about placing themselves in a situation where idolaters would "make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice," and hence be drawn into idolatry (Exodus 34:15).

When Daniel was taken captive to Babylon he refused to eat the food from the king's table or drink the wine, because, "even the clean animals that were eaten were first offered as victims to their gods, and part of the wine was poured out as a libation on their altars" (*Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge*; Daniel 1:8).

## Prophetic Warnings

There are numerous prophecies in the Bible declaring God's condemnation of Israel's idolatrous practices and warning of Divine punishment for such. In the days leading up to Christ's second coming one third of mankind are prophesied to be killed by the plagues of the sixth trumpet. "But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk" (Revelation 9:20). So we see clearly that idolatry is a major reason for God's wrath at the end of this age.

In another prophecy applying to the latter days, Isaiah wrote, "Those who sanctify themselves and purify themselves, To go to the gardens After an idol in the midst, Eating swine's flesh and the abomination and the mouse, Shall be consumed together," says the Lord" (Isaiah 66:17). The context implies that "abomination" in this instan-

ce refers to an idol sacrifice (cf. Isaiah 65:3-4, 11).

This is but a sampling of prophecies warning that idolatry, and the sacrificing of food to idols, are among the leading sins of today's descendants of Jacob, or Israel (who are not just the Jewish people, but who comprise several nations, or portions of nations, including Britain and America).

### Gentile Customs in Apostolic Times

An understanding of prevailing Gentile society and customs at the time of the apostles can help set the background for a clear understanding of New Testament teachings concerning the eating of food offered to idols. As we have seen, the Scriptures clearly forbade the worshiping of idols, sacrificing to them, or eating of idol sacrifices upon invitation. But it was not always easy to distinguish between food that had been sacrificed to idols and food that had not.

Sacrifice and food and drink offerings were fundamental to the worship of the pagan idols which pervaded the world's culture, including that of Greece and Rome. "...every family had its own god; to him the divine fire burned unextinguished at the hearth, and to him offerings of food and wine were made before every meal" (*The Life of Greece*, Will Durant, p. 175). Sacrifices were an important part of public worship, too. "Sacrifices, among the ancients, formed the chief part of every religious act" (*The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature and Art*, p. 551).

Usually, only a small portion was burned. "The remainder... was either roasted at once for the sacrificial banquet and so consumed, or taken home. Festal sacrifices at the public expense were often combined with a public meal" (*ibid.*, p. 553). Of that given to the priests, the excess was commonly sold in a public meat market (*Paganism in the Roman Empire*, Ramsy MacMullen, p. 41; *Matthew Henry Commentary*; and A. T. Robert-

son, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, at 1 Corinthians 10:25).

In the homes we've already noted that meals were commonly preceded by an offering to an idol. Meat, when it was eaten, may have included that brought home from some public sacrifice.

Because the faithful among them refused to participate in this pagan religion centered social life, "...Jews and Christians, holding themselves aloof from anything the gods touched, suffered under the reputation of misanthropy!" (MacMullen, p. 40). "For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you" (1 Peter 4:3).

### New Testament Teaching

As Gentile converts began to come into the Church in the Apostolic era, a controversy arose regarding the question of circumcision. The decision of the Church—based on Old Testament Scripture (e.g., Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Isaiah 11:10; 42:1, 6-7; 56:1-8, 60:3; 66:23; Jeremiah 4:4; Zechariah 14:16; cf. Acts 13:47; 15:14-21), the teachings of Jesus (e.g., Matthew 28:19-20; John 4:21-23), and the fact that the Holy Spirit had been given to uncircumcised Gentiles (Acts 15:7-8)—was that circumcision of adult male converts was not necessary, but in order to be accepted into the congregation converts must "*abstain from things polluted by idols...*" along with certain other unclean practices common among the Gentiles (Acts 15:20; cf. Verse 29; 21:25). Of course, once a part of the Church, Gentiles, Jews, and other Israelites, were all expected to keep God's commandments as taught by Jesus Christ, and the apostles (cf. John 14:21; 1 Corinthians 7:19; 10:6-11, 14; Colossians 3:5-11, James

1:22; 2:8-12; etc.).

It has been alleged by some that Paul later abrogated the prohibition against eating meat offered to idols. Paul wrote: "If anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple..." (1 Corinthians 8:10). So it's argued that eating idol sacrifices is okay, because after all, we all know that an idol is nothing (verse 4). This actually was the argument being put forward by some in the Corinthian church. Anyone with scruples about this is "weak," it's supposed.

This leads some to conclude that virtually any practice associated with idolatry is acceptable, supposing that it's a matter of indifference to God. Some Gnostics used this line of argument, as attested by Irenaeus in *Against Heresies*. They used images of pagan deities in their worship (I.X-XIII.4), and had no scruples about eating idol sacrifices, "maintaining that God does not greatly regard such matters" (I.VI.3; I.XXIV.5; I.XXVIII.2). They readily took part in the celebration of heathen festivals (I.VI.3).

However, to understand correctly what Paul taught one must view 1 Corinthians 8 within its direct context, which extends through chapter 10, and also consider the context of the entire Bible.

It's important to realize that Paul was responding to questions and arguments put forward in a letter to him from the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 7:1; 8:1). One of the subjects discussed was food offered to idols. In the discussion, "Aspects of the matter come forward not touched on in the Jerusalem Conference" (Robertson at 8:1). 'Things offered to idols,' "...meant the portion of the flesh left over after the heathen sacrifices" (*ibid.*). Commonly, it was (1) eaten sacrificially, (2) taken home for private meals, or (3) sold at the public market. In chapters eight through ten, Paul deals with how such meat should be treated in these situations.



In the statement, "We know that we all have knowledge," Paul is making reference to an argument put forth by some of the Corinthians (cf. Conybeare and Howson, *Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 396 n.; Robertson; *Matthew Henry's Commentary, et al.*). They felt their superior knowledge—to wit, that idols are nothing—gave them liberty to eat food sacrificed to them with impunity.

Indeed, Paul confirms, we do know that idols are nothing (verse 4). This is taught throughout Scripture. One of the Hebrew words used in the Old Testament in its plural form for idols is *`eliyl*, which means nought (nothingness), from the root *`alal*, to be nothing (*Analytical Hebrew and Chaldean Lexicon*, cf. Leviticus 19:4; Isaiah 41:24, *et al.*).

Paul then goes on to show the Corinthians that their inference from the fact that idols are "nothing" is wrong. First, not all have come to the same level of conviction regarding the efficacy of idols (verse 7). Many among them may regard the idol at some level of consciousness as a real god. "For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?" (verse 10). Note that the verb *eido* (see) is here in the subjunctive mood, a conditional, or "what if" statement. In no way is the statement giving permission for such a thing to be done. In fact, *exactly the opposite!* Paul will make the point that it should *not* be done, for several reasons! "Condition of third class, a possible case. Paul draws the picture of the enlightened brother exercising his 'liberty' by eating in the idol's temple. **Later he will discuss the peril to the man's own soul in this phase of the matter (10:14-22)**, but here he considers only the effect of such conduct on the unenlightened or weak brother. **This bravado at a sacrificial banquet is in itself idolatrous as Paul will show**" (Robertson).

Paul is saying here, assuming for the moment you do have the liberty you think you have, it's still wrong to sit at a sacrificial meal to an idol, because of how it might influence other people. But, as also expounded correctly in *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, he will go on to explain why it would be wrong under any circumstance to do so: "He cautions them against abusing their **liberty, the liberty they thought they had in this matter. For that they mistook this matter, and had no allowance to sit at meat in the idol's temple, seems plain from ch. 10:20, etc.** But the apostle argues here that, even upon the supposition that they had such power, they must be cautious how they use it; it might be a stumbling-block to the weak (v. 9), it might occasion their falling into idolatrous actions, perhaps their falling off from Christianity and revolting again to heathenism."

In chapter 10 Paul develops the subject further by showing that the things that happened to ancient Israel were for our admonition (1 Corinthians 10:1-11). He specifically warns, "And **do not become idolaters** as were some of them. As it is written, 'The people **sat down to eat and drink**, and rose up to play'" (verse 7). Then he warns, "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall" (verse 12). "... flee from idolatry," he commands. He tells them that **those who eat of the sacrifices are partakers of the altar**. And that to partake of things sacrificed to demons is to have fellowship with demons (verses 20-21). To those who are so strong in their own eyes he says, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; **you cannot partake of the Lord's table and the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?**" (verses 21 -22).

Paul thus **confirms the prohibition against eating things sacrificed to idols** as far as partaking of idolatrous banquets is concerned. He then goes

on to discuss the public meat market. "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake" (verse 25). The nature of the meat is not changed because it was offered to an idol (assuming it was bled properly). If some of it is then taken and sold along with other meat in a market it is no less good for food. It is the **conscious knowledge** that the meat is dedicated to an idol that makes the difference. Where such knowledge is lacking, there is no prohibition against eating it. The same principle applies if one is invited to a private meal. The meat may be eaten without scruple unless someone says, "This was offered to idols" (verses 27-30). In that case, Paul says, **"do not eat it,"** again considering how your actions may affect other people.

We've already reviewed the condemnation pronounced on idolatrous activities from a number of Scriptures. Paul explained to the Corinthians how the prohibition against eating things sacrificed to idols applies in varying circumstances. He changed nothing. Further evidence of this is supplied in the book of Revelation, written decades after Paul died. In that book Jesus Christ condemns teaching to eat things sacrificed to idols (Revelation 2:14, 20).

The lessons for us are clear. Idolatrous banquets—including Christmas dinners or similar affairs, or other customs clearly rooted in idolatrous worship—are to be eschewed. As John wrote, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

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## In This Issue

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The Scriptures reveal a definite path to salvation. And as with any path there are steps along the way. There is an initial stage of salvation, where we stand before God as cleansed, and no longer guilty in his eyes. But salvation is also a process, that has multiple stages, or steps, leading to the final destination, eternal life in God's Kingdom.

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The World desperately needs peace. You can do your part with specific behaviors you can practice to walk in the way of peace.

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Visit [cogmessenger.org](http://cogmessenger.org) to learn more about God's purpose and plan for mankind.

"The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." – Psalms 37:11