

What were the Teachings of Jesus Christ and the Doctrines of the Early Church?

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Introduction

The Bible states Jesus Christ was sent to do the will of God, the Father, and to accomplish His work (Jn. 4:34). This work includes building and developing his church—those whom God is calling out of this world (Rom. 2:4; Jn. 6:44; 17:9; Jas. 2:5; Rev. 18:4). It's not a physical building often referred to as “the church”, but the people who are called by the Father for a particular work leading up to the return of Messiah.

Jesus Christ did not come to build multiple churches; he said, I will build my assembly; and the gates of hades will not prevail against it” (Mt. 16:18, RNT).

He did build it—one assembly, commissioned to spread the good news, the very message of God, to the entire world (Mt. 24:14; Ac. 2:1ff). This church would not come to an end due to the natural death of its people, nor be taken over by deceit (Mt. 10:22; Mk. 13:13), despite the Adversary's attempts to corrupt the truth, which Paul said some people were already trying to do in the early church (Gal. 1:6-9).

But what do we find today? The Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary regularly publishes and updates the Statistics of Global Missions online. Here you will find the current number of Christian denominations in the world to be in the order of some 39,000! All of these were founded by men, each professing to teach the truth of God while many of them contradict and disagree with one another. They can't all be right, can they? The Bible says this is not possible, there is only one way to the Father (Jn. 14:6; 1Cor. 1:10-13; 2Pet. 1:20). So how does one identify the very church Jesus Christ said he would build? Does scripture provide a way to discern between the teachings of Jesus Christ and the early church, and those churches which claim to teach the truth but are misled? (Mt. 7:21-23; Rev. 12:9). Yes, the Bible does provide the means to test what is truth and what is not (Ps. 119:160; Isa. 8:20; Mt. 4:4; 1Thes. 5:21; 2Tim. 3:16-17).

The true gospel of God was known and kept by the apostles and disciples of Christ in the early church during the first century CE. One fundamental teaching was that Christ alone is the head of the church (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23). No other being was appointed to this position. All of Christ's responsibilities were delegated to him by his God and Father (Mt. 17:5; Jn. 14:28; 2Cor. 11:31).

It is written that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Heb. 13:8), only doing the will of his Father (Jn. 6:38). As the church and its doctrines were built upon Christ, who is the chief cornerstone (Ps. 118:22) and the apostles (Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14), it must be identifiable today by these same doctrines. In this study we will briefly examine some of the fundamental teachings of the early church, which, according to Christ, must remain today.

Who was the object of worship in the early church?

Of all the divine instructions in the Bible that have come to us from the one true God, His son Jesus Christ said the following was the first and greatest,

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind (Mt. 22:37).

If we are required to fulfill this command, we must first come to know the true identity of the Lord our God, for if we do not know who He is, we cannot know how He wishes to be served and worshiped.

The scripture Christ quoted in Matthew 22:37 is from Deuteronomy 6:5, which follows one of the most important verses in the Bible,

Shema Yisrael Yahovah Elohenu Yahovah ehad, - "Hear, O Israel! Yahovah our God, Yahovah is one!"

Christ directs us to serve the only true God – our Father, whom the Bible teaches we must love with our entire being, as there is only one God and Father of all (cf. 1Cor. 1:8; Eph. 4:6). Therefore, we must determine who the one true God is from scripture, His relationship to Jesus Christ and all of us.

Christ said plainly that his Father is greater than he (Jn. 13:16; 14:28). This did not change after his resurrection because Christ is to return everything to the Father when he has completed the work he was sent to do (1Cor. 15:24). If Christ were equal to his Father, he would not be handing the kingdom back to Him. Christ also directed the disciples to worship his God and Father only (Mt. 6:9). To worship any other being, human or spirit, is contrary to the first commandment (Ex. 20:1-3). Therefore, singing praises or praying to Christ or other angels is against the law and will of the Father (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9). All worship is to be directed to the Father alone (Mt. 6:8-9). As the son of God is our Mediator, we pray to the Father in the name and by the authority of Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:13) because his sacrifice, offered on our behalf, enables everyone to draw near to the one true God (Jn. 17:3).

Who did the early church think Jesus Christ was?

And Jesus, having gone into the regions of Caesarea Philippi, asked his disciples, saying, "Who do the people say the Son of man is?" ¹⁴And they said, 'Some indeed say, John the Immerser; and others, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets,' ¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say I am?" ¹⁶And Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God." ¹⁷And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in the heavens" (Mt. 16:13-17, RNT).

According to Christ's question in the passage above, he thought it was important for his disciples to understand who he was because it confirmed they were indeed called by the Father (Jn. 6:44, 65; 1Cor. 2:10-14), and that they correctly understood the prophecies related to his first coming. After Christ's death and resurrection, his disciples would have to go out and explain that Christ fulfilled all the promises related to him in the Law and the Prophets (Mt. 5:17). Many of these prophecies revealed that Christ would be born as a man, and that his Father alone is the one true God (2Sam. 7:12-17; Ps. 2:7-12).

Who did the early church think Jesus Christ was prior to his birth as a man?

Some believe Messiah did not pre-exist, however from his own words, we see that he did pre-exist as the Angel of God with the rank of Morning Star (Rev. 22:16; Jb. 38:7). He came down from heaven where he existed prior to becoming the Son of God (Jn. 3:13; 1Cor. 15:47). He is also the captain/commander of the host of God having jurisdiction over all angels (Jos. 5:13-15; Heb. 1:7-9; Rev. 19:14-16). All faithful angels are Christ's companions (Heb. 1:9), but Christ was given greater authority by his Father who created him (Heb. 1:13). There is one other Morning Star identified in scripture, but his authority was removed because he rebelled against the law of God (Isa. 14:12-20; Eze. 28:14-19). The fall of this morning star, Satan, was witnessed by Christ (Lk. 10:18); this provides further proof of Christ's existence as the Angel of God (Ex. 14:19; Rev. 22:16) prior to his birth as a man. Due to the fact that God is not a respecter of persons (Ac. 10:34), He will deal with all who rebel against His law in similar fashion unless they repent of sin (Mt. 3:8) and begin living in accordance with His every word. Christ is also referred to as the Angel of His Presence (the Father's Presence) because he is at the right hand of God (Mt. 26:64; Ac. 7:55).

The Bible identifies Christ as the Angel of God in the Old Testament (1Cor. 10:4):

Behold, I send an angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place I have prepared (cf. Jn. 14:2). In my Father's house are many dwellings; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you (Ex. 23:20).

Beware of him and obey his voice (cf. Mt. 17:5). While he (Christ) was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear him!" (Ex. 23:21a; Ed. note in parenthesis).

Do not provoke him (the angel of the Lord), for he will not pardon your transgressions (cf. Mt. 9:6) But that you may know that the son of man has power on Earth to forgive sins, then he said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed and go to your house" (Ex. 23:21b cf. Gen. 48:15-16; Isa. 63:8-9; Ed. note in parenthesis).

For my (the Father's) name is in him (the Angel of the Lord; cf. Isa. 9:6-7) For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given (in sacrifice), and the government will be upon his shoulder and his name will be called Wonderful (cf. Jud. 13:18) Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Ex. 23:21c; Ed. notes in parentheses).

As we are not to worship angels (Dt. 4:19; 17:3; Rev. 22:8-9), he is not to be worshiped either. Christ is our High Priest (Heb. 2:17) and intercessor/mediator (Heb. 7:25; 8:6; 12:24). Likewise, the High Priest in the OT was not to be worshiped because he was appointed as mediator for the nation of Israel. As Messiah was given the title “King of kings” by his Father (Rev. 19:16), we are to show deep respect and honor toward Christ, but that is very different from worshiping him as God (Php. 2:9-11).

What did the early church know and teach about the Heavenly Host?

The early church had only the OT scriptures available to them, therefore, they would have known the loyal angels live by every word of God (Ps. 103:20). They understood angels are servants of the one true God (2Kgs. 19:35; Jos. 5:13-15; Dan. 7:10; Heb. 1:14) and they assist those individuals whom God is working with at any given time in human history (Gen. 19:1, 9-13; 22:1-12; Ex. 23:20-23; Isa. 63:9; Mt. 4:11; Ac. 7:35). Angels are not to be worshiped (Dt. 4:19; 17:3; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9). The terms stars, morning stars, sons of God, and host of heaven, are frequently used to describe the angelic host; both loyal and disloyal (Isa. 14:12; Jb. 38:7-8; Rev. 22:16). The early church knew that a third of the angels had rebelled against their Creator (2Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; Rev. 12:4). The church also knew that Satan and the other disloyal angels (demons) would eventually be changed to flesh and blood beings (Rom. 16:20; Eze. 28:17-19; Isa. 14:15-20; Rev. 12:9) for the purpose of judgment following death and the second resurrection (Rom. 6:23; 16:20; Jd. 6).

What did the early church teach about God’s Holy Spirit?

Holy spirit is the term used to identify the spirit and power of the only perfect and true God (Mt. 22:29; Lk. 4:14; 24:49; Ac. 1:8; 10:38; Rom. 15:13-19; 2Tim. 1:7). It is by this power that our Father creates and sustains everything in heaven and earth (Ps. 104:30; Jb. 33:4). If God’s holy spirit were a third entity within a godhead, then this holy spirit would have been the Father of Jesus Christ because he would then have been conceived by it (Lk. 1:35). However, by Christ’s own words we know that he was conceived and brought forth by God through the power of His spirit, for Messiah directed us to worship his Father only (Mt. 6:9-13). If we claim that God’s holy spirit is a third divine being in a trinity, we are breaking the first commandment in the law (Ex. 20:3-6). Therefore, apart from incorrect translations and additions to the NT text on this subject, we can conclude the early church did not teach that the one true God consists of three divine beings. In fact, teaching that God is a trinity shows the absence of God’s spirit. Without His spirit it is impossible to understand who the one true God is (1Cor. 2:11-14; Rom. 8:5-10; Jn. 17:3). The Bible states salvation depends upon receipt of God’s spirit (Rom. 8:11), however, as the Bible also teaches that God’s spirit can be quenched (1Thes. 5:19; Ps. 51:11), the teaching of eternal security also known as, “once saved always saved” is not Biblical. It is by God’s spirit that we partake of His

divine nature, as did Christ, and become sons of God (Mt. 3:16; Mk. 1:10; Lk. 3:22; Jn. 1:12, 32; 2Pet. 1:3-4).

An example of a known alteration to a NT translation which seeks to alter the truth concerning the godhead, and is not found in the early Greek manuscripts, is in the bolded portion below of 1John 5:7 in the King James Version.

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

This passage in the KJV has often been cited as an explicit reference to the doctrine of the trinity. The fact of the matter is it was a late insertion and a known forgery.

There is evidence indicating a medieval Latin writer inserted this portion of the verse, now known as the Comma Johanneum (1 John), while claiming to quote from the first book of John. It appears to have originated as a marginal note quoting a work by Cyprian, which a later copyist decided to place in the main body of the text. This passage appeared in several later copies and was then back-translated into a Greek New Testament copy.

Erasmus, a Greek scholar of the 16th century, was aware of the fact that these words were not found in any of the Greek manuscripts known to him and refused to include it in his compilation of the Bible codex known as the Textus Receptus. The church in Rome, however, began to pressure Erasmus to include the passage; but he said he would not unless it could be shown to exist in a Greek NT manuscript. Soon thereafter, Erasmus was presented an example containing it (codex 61, written in c. 1520), which he rightly suspected was a fabrication, but was now obliged to include it.

This spurious passage thus found its way into the third edition of the Textus Receptus (c. 1522), which formed the basis of the King James Version (1611). It is not found in any translation prior to this time, nor is it included in the first and second editions of the Textus Receptus.

The Moody Bible Institute has this to say concerning the Comma Johanneum,

The text of this verse should read, 'Because there are three that bear record.' The remainder of the verse is spurious. Not a single manuscript contains the Trinitarian addition before the fourteenth century, and the verse is never quoted in the controversies over the Trinity in the first 450 years of the church era. (The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, edited by Charles F. Pfeiffer (OT) and Earett F. Harrison (NT), by Moody Press, Chicago, a division of Moody Bible Institute, ISBN: 0-8024-9695-4, Library of Congress Catalog Card #: 62-20893, page 1477).

Scripture is not vague or ambiguous concerning the nature of the only true and living God (Dt. 6:5; Jn. 17:3; Rom. 16:26; 1Thes. 1:9).

Another example of an alteration found in the King James Version is Acts 12:4,

And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people (KJV; emphasis added).

The Greek word translated “Easter” in this passage is the word 3957 Gk. páscha. This word appears twenty-nine times in the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Twenty-eight times the word is rendered “Passover” in reference to the Feast of Passover, a memorial of the night Yahovah passed over Egypt and killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians, both man and beast, and executed judgment upon all their gods (Ex. 12:1-13), thus delivering Israel from four hundred years of slavery. In Acts 12:4 it is falsely translated Easter.

The word “Easter” is a modern derivation of the ancient Babylonian and Assyrian Ishtar, “Queen of the heavens” who presided over love, war and fertility (Jer.7:18; 44:17-19,25). She was called Ashtoreth by the Phoenicians (Sidonians; 1Kgs. 11:5, 33; 2Kgs. 23:13) and known as the mother-goddess Astarte by the ancient Chaldeans. She was adopted later by the Greeks as the goddesses: Aphrodite, Athena, and Eros; and by the Romans: Venus, Diana, and Minerva. Ishtar is also identified with the Sumerian goddess Inanna. She is a fertility goddess and mother of Baal called “Ashtaroth” in the Old Testament (Jgs. 2:13; 10:6; 1Sam. 12:10). Adherents worshiped hewn trees or upright wooden idols (phallic symbols) called “Ashera” (Dt. 16:21; Jgs. 6:25-27; 1Kgs. 15:13; 18:19; 2Kgs. 17:16; 23:4, Jer. 10:1-5).

The false practices associated with Easter originated with the Eastern Sun cult systems and the worship of the stars (fallen ones) of the heavens. Involvement in this system contravenes God’s commands and is considered idolatrous (2Kgs. 23:5; Jer. 7:18; Eze. 6:9; 8:15-16; Zep. 1:4).

God calls His servants to worship Him alone. He provides the divinely appointed times in His written word so that we may serve Him in accordance with His will (Lev. 23:1ff; Lk. 20:46; 1Cor. 5:7-8; Col. 2:16; Jd. 12). It is by the power of God’s holy spirit that we are able to understand His truth (Rom. 8:5-9; 1Cor. 2:10-15; Eph.3:1-6; 1Jn. 5:6) and discern error (Isa. 8:20), including mistranslations (Jer. 8:8; 1Jn. 4:6) and come to know who the one true God is (Jn. 17:3).

How was the early church structured?

The Bible says Jesus Christ is the head of the church, thus it is to him that all of God’s people must look for direction, both individually and as a body of believers. An

incorporated church, registered with the state, has signed a covenant agreeing to function in accordance with the requirements set out by state law. This includes the election of a board of directors whose duties generally include making corporate, ecclesiastical, and spiritual decisions, which removes the participation and responsibility of the rest of the brethren (1Cor. 12:13-31; Rom. 12:4-5). The early church was not structured in this manner; it was not incorporated, nor did it seek to join itself with the state in any way (2Cor. 6:14).

Did the early church have priests, bishops, and other church “officers” that held positions of authority?

Elders were appointed based on the service they were already providing to the church (Ac. 14:23; 16:4; Ti. 1:5; 1Tm. 3:8-13). The elders did not have authority to “lord it over the brethren” (Mt. 20:25-28; Mk. 10:42-45). This is a characteristic associated with the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which Christ hated (Rev. 2:6, 15). Instead, elders are to be helpers of the brethren and give guidance when needed (2Cor. 1:24). They are not to be ordained without first being examined and proven over time (1Tm. 3:1-13).

What does the New Testament say about elevating people to positions of authority in the church?

Any tendency to follow one human leader will cause division in the Church (1Cor. 1:10-15). This is one reason so many different denominations all claim to worship the same God. Following a religious leader was regarded as being carnal, primarily because trust would then be placed in a man rather than in the true head of the Church, Jesus Christ (1Cor. 3:1-4).

Incorporating a body of believers under the jurisdiction of a board of directors or sole proprietorship, which is answerable to a state government, is also contrary to the structure Jesus Christ established when he built the church (1Cor. 11:3).

Did the early church believe or teach that Peter was the chief apostle?

Based on a misapplication or misunderstanding of Matthew 16:18, many claim that Peter was ordained to be the chief apostle, when in fact Christ was stating it was through his sacrifice that the church could be built (Eph. 2:19-22). There was no position of chief prophet within the Old Covenant, and the New Testament shows there was no position of chief apostle within the New Covenant (Eph. 2:20). If Peter were the chief apostle after the death of Christ, he would have been the one to make the declaration in Acts 15:13-21. Instead, it was made by another apostle, James (Jacob). Following that declaration no decision was considered final until all the apostles, elders, and brethren were in agreement (Ac. 15:22).

Did the early church believe those serving and teaching were not to be married?

An individual working and serving in the church was able to have a wife and she would sometimes travel with him (1Cor. 9:5). One of the conditions associated with a man being ordained as an elder/deacon included having only one wife (Eph. 5:30-31; 1Tm. 3:2, 12; Ti. 1:6). Hence, the true church of God taught that its elders could be married, but only to one woman as polygamy is unlawful (Mt. 19:5-6). This law applies to everyone otherwise it would be showing a respect of persons, which is contrary to God's will (Lev. 19:15; Ac. 10:34). In addition, the early church continued to obey the divine instructions of God in the law pertaining to homosexuality (Lev. 18:22; cf. Rom. 1:26-27).

Where did the early church meet?

The Bible mentions the early church established house fellowships, meeting regularly in private homes (Ac. 2:46; 5:42; 7:49-50; 8:3; 20:20; 28:30-31; Rom. 16:5; 1Cor. 16:19; Phm. 1:2). Another example in Acts 1:13, shows that the church met in an upper room at an inn during Pentecost. Those traveling and teaching would sometimes speak in synagogues and reason with the Jews (Ac. 9:20; 13:15). There is no mention in scripture of the early church building structures for the purpose of assembling for worship. They understood that the term "church" applied to the body of believers and not to a physical building (1Cor. 3:16-17; 2Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21). The original Greek word translated "church" in the NT is 1577 SGD (Strong's Greek Dictionary) Gk. (Greek) *ekklesia* meaning, "called out ones".

What was the commission of the early church?

Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, ³⁵but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. ³⁶"The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) ³⁷you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. ³⁸"You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. ³⁹"We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross (tree, wood or timber, 3586 Gk. *xulon*). ⁴⁰"God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible, ⁴¹not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. ⁴²"And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³"Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins." ⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. ⁴⁵All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. ⁴⁶For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, ⁴⁷"Surely no one can refuse the

water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" ⁴⁸And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days (Ac. 10:34-48, NASB; emphasis added).

The disciples of Messiah were firsthand witnesses to the fact that he fulfilled those aspects of the OT prophecies, which proved Christ was the one sent to provide mankind with reconciliation to the Father (Mt. 5:17). In addition, the disciples were given certain gifts such as healing, in order to add authority to what they were teaching about Christ (Ac. 5:15; 19:11-12) and the revelation that salvation was available to gentiles.

Did the commission of the early church change?

And Jesus approached and spoke to them, saying, "All authority was given to me in heaven and on earth; ¹⁹therefore, as you walk, make disciples of all the nations, into my name, ²⁰teaching them to keep everything, as much as I commanded you; and behold, I am with you all the days, until the full completion of this age" (Mt. 28:18-20, RNT).

We see from the scripture above the commission of the early church was to continue throughout all generations.

This commission is to proclaim the message that Christ was sent to provide the means of reconciliation to the Father because sin has separated us from God (Isa. 59:1-2). After repentance and baptism a person is not to live contrary to the law of God as he/she did before, but to be doers of His word (Rom. 2:13; 6:1ff; Dt. 32:46; Jas. 1:22, 25). Consequently, the true church of God does not teach that Christ came to do away with his Father's law (Mt. 5:17-19; 1Jn. 3:4). We are called to spread this message of the good news (i.e. gospel) as we walk (Mt. 28:19-20).

Did the early church believe they were to try to convert others and that their efforts would save people?

In order to better understand the answer to this question, we need to examine what the head of the church taught on this subject. Christ mentioned that his church would be small in number and that God, the Father, is not calling all of mankind at this time.

For many are called but few are chosen (Mt. 22:14, RNT; cf. Jn. 6:44-45, 65).

And the disciples drew near and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" ¹¹And he answered and said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, but to them it has not been given. ¹²For whoever has, to him it shall be given, and in abundance; but whoever does not have, what he has shall also be taken up from him. ¹³Therefore I speak to them in parables; because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor understand. ¹⁴And to them the prophecy of Isaiah is filled up which says, 'Hearing you hear, but you will not understand; and seeing you see, but you will not perceive; ¹⁵For the heart of the people has become thick-skinned, and with the ears, they scarcely hear, and they have shut their eyes lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand in their heart

and return, and I should heal them.' ¹⁶But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears, because they hear. ¹⁷For Amen, I say to you, that many prophets and righteous ones desired to look at what you see, and did not see, and to hear what you hear, and they did not hear it (Mt. 13:10-17, RNT).

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom (Lk. 12:32, NASB; emphasis added).

For those who willingly obey God's Holy Days the plan of salvation is revealed, and it shows that He is calling people in a progressive manner (1Cor. 15:22-24). Each of the annual Feasts reveal through symbolism the resurrections starting with Christ (1Cor. 15:20, 23) and the entire plan of salvation.

In Romans 2:4, the process of calling an individual commences with the action of the Father leading them to His truth, resulting in repentance (2Tm. 2:25). Once someone is called, they have to make a decision based on the understanding that they have transgressed God's law (1Jn. 3:4) having earned the wages of death (Rom. 6:23). When sinners are truly repentant (2Cor. 7:10) and deeply desire to begin living in accordance with God's written word, they have reached the point of repentance (2Pet. 3:9). When one reaches this point, they realize the need for God's mercy and forgiveness. The next step is baptism (Ac. 2:38; 3:19) symbolizing the death and burial of the old way of living, which was contrary to God's law (Rom. 6:3-6; Col. 3:9-10); this is why a person is to be totally immersed in water (Mt. 3:16; Mk. 1:10). This begins a new life in harmony with God's will (Rom. 6:4). God's church does not baptize by sprinkling a person with water because it cannot picture the complete death and burial of the person's former way of living (Rom. 6; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9; 1Pet. 3:21).

The next step in the process of conversion involves God the Father giving the newly converted person to His son (Jn. 6:37; 10:29; 17:2, 6, 12, 24). Jesus Christ then teaches the newly converted person and intercedes for them when they fall short (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:14-16; Rom. 7:24). There would be no need for Christ to continue interceding on our behalf if God's law had been abolished because sin could not then be imputed. King David had God's holy spirit (Ps. 51:11), was a man after God's own heart (1Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22) and yet sinned (Ps. 51). Therefore he required forgiveness on an ongoing basis, receiving God's mercy upon repentance (2Sam. 12:13). Repentance is not a onetime experience (See section below), rather, it is part of an individual's ongoing spiritual growth (Eph. 4:15; 1Pet. 2:2; 2Pet. 3:18).

It is interesting to note that Christ addressed individuals who were trying to convert others but were not willing to obey his father's law (Mt. 7:21-23).

Did the early church teach that Christians went directly to heaven after death, while sinners went to hell?

The early church knew that the dead do not rise until Christ's second coming (Eccl. 3:19; 9:5; Jb. 14:13-14, 21; Ps. 6:5; 30:9; 88:10; Eze. 18:4; 1Cor. 15:12-58; 1Thes. 4:13-17). Therefore, no one is going to either heaven or hell at death (Ps. 115:17), even though many who claim to represent Christianity make statements to this effect (Ac. 24:15). There are several examples in scripture of individuals appearing after their death, but upon closer examination these are visions and not actual resurrections to eternal life (1Sam. 28:11-16; Mt. 17:3; cf. Jn. 3:13). There was a one-time event where some people were raised to physical life at the time of Christ's death, but this demonstrates no one continues on in heaven or hell after they pass away (Mt. 27:52-53). Job also understood that all who die remain dead until the resurrection (Jb. 14:14).

The early church taught that the followers of Christ who remain until his return are not preceded by those who are dead in Christ, which means there will not be a secret rapture prior to his return (1Thes. 4:13-17). Instead, scripture shows an orderly resurrection at his return (1Cor. 15:22-24; 51-52).

Christ's sacrifice at his first advent was to provide the means of salvation. Christ's second coming as King of kings will bring about a period of judgment (Rom. 14:10-12; Php. 2:9-11; Rev. 19:16). This was pre-figured in the conduct of the High Priest in Leviticus 16 where he came first to give an offering for himself and his family, followed by a second offering. The second offering symbolized a judgment between two beings (goats, Lev. 16:8-10), picturing two different systems of governing; one in accordance with God's law, the other being rebellious to it. The goat that was banished to the wilderness (Lev. 16:21), portrayed Satan's temporary system of government, which will ultimately be removed as a result of Christ's victory over death, depicted by the first goat that was sacrificed (Lev. 16:15).

We see this period of judgment commences with the church (1Pet. 4:17), which includes the faithful of the OT (Heb. 11:1), all of whom will be resurrected at Christ's return. They will assist him on this earth, not heaven (Rev. 5:10), for one thousand years (Rev. 20:4, 6); after which the balance of mankind and the disloyal host of heaven will be resurrected for the purpose of judgment in the hope of reconciliation to God (Rev. 20:5; 2Pet. 3:9). Logically, a resurrection of the dead makes no sense if a person has already gone either to heaven or hell (Jn. 5:21; Rom. 8:11; 1Cor. 15:13-20; 2Cor. 1:9).

Did the early church believe in the doctrine of the immortal soul?

The belief that a person continues to live after death in a different form (the immortal soul doctrine), was not taught by the early church as this is contrary to scripture (Jn. 3:5; Rom. 8:11; 1Cor. 15:13-18, 45; Eph. 2:4-5; Col. 2:13; Ps. 6:5). Rather, it was Plato the philosopher who popularized the ancient lie concerning the immortal soul teaching (Gen. 3:4; cf. Jn. 8:44d; Eze. 18:4) throughout the Greek world during the 4th century

B.C. This false teaching was embraced very early by all the major Christian organizations and considered a fundamental Bible truth. Instead, the church taught the dead are not conscious, knowing nothing (Eccl. 9:5 cf. Ac. 2:29), do not praise the Lord as they are in a state of silence (Ps. 115:17) and waiting to be resurrected at a future date (Jb. 14:14; 17:13; cf. 1Cor. 15:20-22). Death is symbolized as a type of sleep because everyone who has died will eventually wake up in a resurrection (1Cor. 15:50-58; 1Thes. 4:14; Rev. 20:4-6, 12-13).

Did the early church teach a different gospel message than what is prophesied in the Old Testament?

If the early church taught a different gospel than what is found in the OT, then the light of truth was not in them and the words of Paul and James would be meaningless (Isa. 8:20; Ac. 24:14-16; Rom. 7:12; Heb. 8:10; 10:16; Jas. 1:25; 2:9-12; 4:11) and they would be false prophets – which is not the case (2Tm. 3:16). There is only one gospel (Rom. 1:16-17), it is the hope of salvation from death (the payment for breaking the divine law, Rom. 6:23). It is by the grace of God, the Father, through Jesus Christ that salvation is granted (Jn. 14:6; 17:1-3; Eph. 2:8).

What did the early church teach about variations of the gospel message?

The gospel was first proclaimed in Eden (Gen. 3:15; cf. Rev. 12:17), given to Abraham (Gen. 17:2-9; Gal. 3:6-9) and then to the children of Israel (Heb. 4:1-2; Rom. 9:30-33). Central to this gospel is trust and obedience toward God and His law (Ps. 3:1-8), therefore, the change in the law must be correctly understood (Heb. 7:12), as proper adherence to the covenant depends on it (Dt. 7:9; Dan. 9:4). The promise of the covenant is to remove our sin (Rom. 11:25-27), so we may have life (Isa. 55:3), which is everlasting (Heb. 13:20-21). The gospel applies to all equally (Num. 15:29; Mal. 4:1-6; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 2:12-13) and is proclaimed from generation to generation (Mt. 28:18-20; Isa. 51:4-8).

From Christ's comments, as well as statements made by his disciples, we can see from scripture that different messages (gospels) about his mission were extant at the time of the early church. Paul pointed out that there was only one gospel, and that Christ's followers needed to be careful that they were not misled (Gal. 1:6-8). The early church taught that Christ had fulfilled those aspects of the Law and Prophets associated with the temple system (Ac. 7:48-50). These included animal sacrifices, circumcision, and the Levitical/Aaronic priesthood. Some within the early church were teaching that these activities were not fulfilled in Christ and that new converts had to be circumcised (Gal. 5:1-13) while others were teaching that true believers in Christ did not need to obey God's law anymore (Mt. 7:21-23; Lk. 13:22-27; 2Thes. 2:7; 1Jn. 2:29). Both these positions were incorrect and represented variations of Christ's message (the gospel) that were to be rejected (Gal. 1:6-8; cf. Dt. 4:2; 12:32).

The passages in scripture which speak of the corruption of God's truth make it clear that false teachers and false doctrines introduced error very soon after Jesus Christ established the church. It has continued since that time and effects everyone's understanding of God's plan to some extent. The early church writers admonish all who wish to obey God to guard themselves from deception and to examine and prove all things, holding fast to what is right (Eph. 5:6; 2Thes. 2:3; 1Thes. 5:2-4; 1Jn. 3:7). The early church understood from scripture the tools necessary to guard themselves from all forms of deception, including subtle variations of the gospel message (Isa. 8:20; Ps. 19:7-9).

What did the early church teach about the ten commandments?

The early church understood the ten commandments summarize man's responsibility to God and fellowman based on Messiah's teaching. Jesus Christ took the first four commandments and showed that by observing these we express our love and respect toward our Father (Mt. 22:36-38). He then took the last six commandments and showed that by observing these we express our love and respect toward our fellow man (Mt. 7:12; 22:39-40; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8).

If we love God and the brethren, we will keep the commandments which include the observance of the Sabbath and Holy Days (1Jn. 5:1-3; Heb. 10:25; Col. 2:16). This is central to identifying the church that Christ leads.

Did the early church teach obedience to God involved keeping only the ten commandments?

All scripture is applicable to those who claim to follow the one true God (2Tm. 3:16).

Christ commanded that his followers live by every word that proceeded from the mouth of his Father (Mt. 4:4; cf. Prov. 30:5).

The apostle Paul stated that the followers of Christ are expected to apply all the teachings that are in accordance with the Law and written in the Prophets (Ac. 24:14). This covenant is not limited to the first five books of the Bible, nor is the law of God, as evidenced by the following scriptures:

John 10:34 refers to Psalms 82:6

John 12:34 refers to Micah 4:7

John 15:25 refers to Psalms 35:19; 69:4; 109:3-5

1Corinthians 14:21 refers to Isaiah 28:11-12.

Adam broke a commandment that is not included in Exodus 20 (Gen. 2:16-17). The consequence for his disobedience is the same as it is for everyone - death (Rom. 6:23). Therefore, obedience to God is not confined to the commands given at Mount Sinai, rather it must include His every word (Mt. 4:4).

It is interesting to note that the weightier matters of the law (Mt. 23:23) are also found, in many cases, outside the first five books of the Bible as we see below.

Justice: Ps. 33:5; Jer. 5:1; Mic. 6:8; Hab. 1:4; Zec. 7:9; Prov. 21:3; Jer. 22:15; Mic. 6:8.

Mercy: Dt. 13:17; 2Sam. 24:14; Ps. 86:15; 119:156; 145:8-9; Prov. 11:17; Isa. 63:9; Hos. 6:6; Zec. 7:9.

Faith: Dt. 7:9; 32:4; 1Chr. 28:9; 2Chr. 20:20; Ps. 4:5; 25:2; 37:3, 5; Dan. 6:23.

In summary, the law of God includes more than just the first five books of the Old Testament (Mt. 4:4).

What is Sin?

The early church taught that whatever is not in accordance with righteous conduct (Ps. 119:172) is contrary to God's will (Rom. 6:16). The apostle Paul tells us, "whatever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23) and since loving God requires faith in Him, which is defined by trusting what He says in His written word, we strive to obey His law (Heb. 11:1; 1Jn. 5:3). All of humanity falls short and sins (Rom. 3:23; 1Jn. 1:10; 2:4) because carnal human nature is rebellious towards God and is not willing to subject itself to His law (Rom. 8:7-8). Therefore the early church understood and taught that all sin is transgression of the law (1Jn. 3:4).

Did the early church worship regularly on a particular day of the week, if so, which one did they identify as Holy?

Even though the Pharisees did not obey God correctly, they understood enough to know that one cannot be a man of God and disobey the Sabbath (Jn. 9:16). Christ was accused of breaking this commandment by some of the Pharisees because he did not follow their Jewish traditions regarding Sabbath conduct (Mk. 7:6-13; Ti. 1:13-14).

As Christ did not sin, we know that he did not break the Sabbath (Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1Pet. 2:21-22). Sin is the transgression of the law (1Jn. 3:4), therefore if Christ had broken the Sabbath, he could not be our savior (Jn. 4:42; Eph. 5:23). The scripture in John 15:10 shows there is no difference in the Father's commandments and Christ's because Christ only did his Father's will (Jn. 5:30; 6:38).

The followers of Christ continued to obey the Sabbath after his death and resurrection (Ac. 13:13-16; 42-44; 16:13; Heb. 4:9; Col. 2:16; Mt. 24:20 - prophetic).

The Bible states that the seventh day of the week (Saturday) is called the Sabbath. It is the day that is set aside by commandment of God for weekly rest and worship (Gen. 2:2; Ex. 20:8-11; Mt. 28:1). This day is to be kept by all of mankind (Num. 15:29; Mk. 2:27). Daniel 7:25 warns that future organized religions under the influence and protection of world governments, would seek to change times and law (i.e. God's calendar and holy days). This explains why some religious organizations keep Friday while others keep Sunday. God provided mankind with a calendar (Ex. 12:2) enabling us to correctly worship Him according to His appointed times (Dt. 16; Ex. 23:14-17; Lev. 23). God's sacred calendar is not the same as the Hillel calendar introduced in the 4th century CE, and currently used by many Jewish groups and various churches. God's calendar was never abolished and continues today (Mal. 3:6; Col. 2:16; Jas. 1:17).

Were there any other Holy Days that Christ and the early church kept?

Christ and the early church kept all the Holy Days appointed by the one true God (Lk. 2:41-43; 22:1; Jn. 2:23; 4:45; 6:4; 7:8-14; 7:37; 12:12, 20; 13:1, 29); not doing so breaks the law, resulting in sin (1Jn. 3:4), which carries the consequence of being cut off from Israel (Ex. 12:15; Lev. 23:29-30; Ps. 37:9; Prov. 2:22; Nah. 1:15). These Holy Days are described by God as His appointed times (Lev. 23:1-2). They were designed and ordained by Him and picture His plan of salvation for mankind (i.e. Lev. 23:10-11; cf. 1Cor. 15:20, 23). The Holy Days were not given to one tribe alone, the Jews (Judah), but to all Israel (Lev. 23:2). This fact is more clearly understood since scripture has revealed that gentiles are grafted into spiritual Israel, the body of Christ (Ac. 15:12-17; Rom. 11:11-36). Many gentiles who sought to obey God during the time of the early church, realized that keeping these days was essential to their relationship with Him (Jn. 12:20). If we love God and the brethren, we will desire to gather together during the Festivals, New Moons and Sabbaths (Col. 2:16; 1Jn. 5:1-3; Heb. 10:25).

Did the early church observe God's appointed times after Christ's death and resurrection?

It is evident in the following scriptures that the early church continued to observe God's appointed times after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Ac. 2:1; 12:1-3; 20:6, 16; 27:9 - Day of Covering; 1Cor. 5:7-8; Col. 2:16; Jd. 1:12).

The following is a summary of the appointed times of God:

The Sabbath – Lev. 23:3; Isa. 66:22-24; Col. 2:16

New Moons – Num. 10:10, 28:11-15; 1Chr. 23:31; 2Chr. 2:4; Ezr. 3:5; Neh. 10:33; Eze. 45:17; 46:6; Isa. 66:22-24; Hos. 2:11; Col. 2:16

Passover/Lord's Supper/Wave Sheaf/Days of Unleavened Bread – Lev. 23:5-14; 1Cor. 5:7-8; 11:23-34

Pentecost – Lev. 23:15-22; Ac. 2; 20:16

Day of Sounding Out (Trumpets) – Lev. 23:23-25; 1Cor. 15:51-52

Day of Covering (Atonement) – Lev. 16; 23:26-32

Feast of Tabernacles/Last Great Day – Lev. 23:33-43; Jn. 7:37; 11:24; 12:48; Zec. 14:16-19

Observance of these Holy Days is one of the identifiers of those who obey the one true God (Col. 2:16; Rev. 12:17; 14:12).

Did the early church observe Christ's day of birth?

As December 25th was the birthday of the pagan god Mithra, and as this day was not absorbed into mainstream Christianity until the 4th century, the early Church would not have associated itself with this custom. The observance of birthdays is rooted in pagan worship systems. When Job's children celebrated their birthdays (Jb. 1:4), he asked God to forgive them because he knew it was contrary to God's will (Jb. 1:5, 19). Activities similar to those observed during December 25th are not to be followed by God's people (Jer. 10:1-5). When Christ was born, the shepherds were tending their flocks in the field by night (Lk. 2:8) and this activity ceases around mid-October due to the cold and rainy season. According to Appendix 179:3 in the Companion Bible, Christ's birth would have occurred around the end of September based on calculations related to the birth of John the Immerser, whose birth preceded Christ's by about 6 months (Lk. 1:26, 36). John would have been conceived shortly after his father Zacharias had completed his course of duty at the Temple (Lk. 1:5; cf. 1Chr. 24:10), around June 13-19. John would have been born nine months later, approximately March/April and Christ would have been born six months after John, which falls around September/October. This period coincides with the Holy Days of the seventh month held at Jerusalem, which would explain why all the inns were full at the time of Christ's birth (Lk. 2:1-8).

How did the early church understand the law of God and grace?

A teaching of particular importance related to God's laws and commandments is found in Matthew 5:18. Here Christ said, "Until heaven and earth pass away, not one iota or

one point will pass away from the law, until everything is accomplished.” Therefore, whatever “the law” is, we can be certain it will not pass away anytime soon and must be something God’s church continues to teach today (Heb. 13:8).

The New Testament contains many witnesses to the fact that the early church served Almighty God by living in accordance with the law. The apostle Luke quotes the apostle Paul in Acts 24:14-16, saying,

But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; ¹⁵having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men (NASB).

Jesus Christ said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15). The commandments he referred to are the same commandments his Father gave Israel; for Christ was perfectly obedient, speaking and doing only that which he received from the Father (Jn. 5:30; 6:38; 14:21; Heb. 5:8).

The early church understood the law of God is a system of life (Mk. 10:17-22; Rom. 8:1-17). Within the law are found the commandments of God, which teach how to love God and how to love our fellowman (Dt. 7:9; 11:1; Neh. 1:5; 1Jn. 5:3). When a commandment of God is broken, a sin has been committed and it carries the penalty of death (1Jn. 3:4; Rom. 6:23).

One of the least understood and most frequently misrepresented teachings of the NT is that of the relationship between the law of God and His grace. It is commonly asserted that God’s law is somehow opposed to grace. In other words, the law of God no longer has jurisdiction over His people and has been replaced by grace. This conclusion is erroneous for several reasons, including that it is a contradiction in terms. The problem lies in the fact that the fundamental purpose and meaning of God’s law is not correctly understood.

Contributing to this dilemma is the widespread misapprehension that the term “under the law” means to be under obligation to live in accordance with it. The truth of the matter is the term “under the law” refers to being under the consequences for having broken the law (Rom. 3:19). All too often the meaning of words are assumed and accepted as correct because they appear self-evident, thus very little time and study is devoted to examining how a particular word was used by the writers of the New Testament.

A similar dilemma exists with the terms “the law of Moses” and, “works of the law.” The common misunderstanding is that the “works of the law” refers to those things which are done in obedience to the commandments. This too is false.

A primary function of the law of God in the first covenant was to provide a means for purification from sin. This was made possible by the sinner bringing the appropriate sacrificial offering to the temple, placing his hand upon the animal and confessing his sins, and then killing, skinning, and dividing it between himself and the priests (Lev. 1:2-9 cf. 16:21). This required a considerable amount of effort on the part of the sinner. What developed over time was reliance upon the physical act of sacrifice for atonement rather than seeking the meaning behind the requirement and faith in God. In other words, many Israelites, and later the scribes, Pharisees etc. placed their faith in the sacrifices for righteousness, rather than upon the one who the sacrificial system pointed to – Jesus Christ. Thus many came to believe the “works of the law” provided salvation, rather than Almighty God through Messiah (Rom. 9:30-33). It is by God's grace (having sent Jesus Christ as our sacrifice) that forgiveness and salvation from the penalty of the law is made possible, not by offering the blood of animals (Heb. 9:13-22). The law (sacrificial system or “law of Moses” cf. Ac. 13:39-40) was a tutor or disciplinarian that was to guide adherents to developing faith in the prophesied Messiah, who is the perfect sacrifice required for salvation. Once Christ (characterized by faith) has come, no longer is there a need for a tutor (sacrificial system; cf. Gal. 3:22-26).

Man's first sin occurred in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12). As they were no longer without sin, this breach fundamentally changed the course of Adam and Eve, placing them under the law (death penalty). As a result, from this point forward all people (the offspring of Adam and Eve) are likewise under the law (Rom. 3:19). Consequently, since all have sinned (Rom. 3:23), everyone is under the law and facing the death penalty because the law requires the life of the sinner as payment for breaking God's divine commands (Gal. 4:4-5). This is the problem with evil. In order to be saved from the wages of sin, a means by which our debt can be paid is required so that we no longer remain under the law (Rom. 6:23; 2:12; Gal. 3:23; 4:4-5). This debt was paid by Jesus Christ (Col. 2:14).

Upon repentance, baptism and continuing obedience, Almighty God delivers sinners from the penalty of the law (death - the consequence of sin), through the offering of His son Jesus Christ. This is an act of grace (Ps. 56:13; Ac. 2:38). Thus, if we are led by God's spirit, we are no longer under the (penalty of) law (Gal. 5:18), but rather, under grace, having been forgiven.

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! ¹⁶Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin [leading] to death, or of obedience [leading] to righteousness? (Rom. 6:15-16).

The law which Christ came to fulfill was the law of sacrifice (Mt. 5:17) not God's commandments. By his death Messiah fulfilled the first covenant sacrificial system and became the mediator of the second covenant, thereby making it possible for fallen man to be freed from the slavery and death penalty of sin (Heb. 10:1-10).

Did the early church believe that Christ abolished his Father's law?

If the early church taught that God's law was no longer applicable in their lives, they would have been disobeying Christ who stated that we are to live by every word of God (Mt. 4:4). If we believe it is alright to disobey God's word, we cannot claim to be a follower of Christ who teaches us to obey Him.

Christ taught that obedience to his Father's commandments was essential to everlasting life (Mk. 10:17-22). He didn't do away with these commands, rather he fulfilled the sacrificial law (Mt. 5:17; Rom. 8:3-4; Heb. 13:8).

In Acts 5:32, we see the early church understood God's Holy Spirit was given to those who desired to obey every word of God. Those who believe they don't have to obey God's law will have to repent of this error if they want to inherit everlasting life (Mt. 19:17; Rom. 2:26-27).

Did the early Church teach Christ nailed the ten commandments to the cross?

When we sin we incur a debt to the law which is symbolized in the Greek word cheirographon SGD 5498. This understanding is described in Colossians 2:14,

having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and he (Christ) has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross (NASB; Ed. note in parenthesis).

This certificate of debt consisting of decrees represents the price required by the law for committing sin. This price can only be paid by one's life (Eze. 18:4, 20; Rom. 6:23) and is required of God (Gen. 9:5). In the first covenant the sacrificial law required the shedding of animal blood to pay the physical debt for sin (Heb. 9:13, 22). In the second covenant, the sacrifice of Christ fulfilled the requirement of the law, which was pictured by the offering of animals through the shedding of his blood for us (Mt. 5:17; Jn. 1:29; Heb. 9:28; 1Pet. 2:24; Isa. 53:10-12). Thus Christ redeems, buys back, man from his state of debt for breaking the law (Gal. 3:13; 4:5; 1Pet. 1:18-19; Gen. 48:16; Isa. 63:9).

The certificate of debt consisting of decrees does not refer to the ten commandments. In the first covenant, the temple system regulated sin among God's people. When the law of God is breached, a debt is incurred. This debt was paid at the temple through

obedience to the sacrificial ordinances. The decrees or ordinances that were against God's people pertained to the requirement in the law to pay the debt by offering the appropriate sacrifices for sin.

Neither God's commandments nor His law were nailed to the cross. It was Christ, who in his death fulfilled the sacrificial ordinances, that took on the debt we all incur for breaking the law (Rom. 7:5-6; 8:2; Gen. 9:5; Ps. 56:13).

Did the early church understand the need for a New Covenant?

From the fall of Adam and Eve sin entered the human race (Rom. 5:12). As sin separates us from the one true God, a means of reconciliation had to be provided. This means of reconciliation was shown, in type, to ancient Israel through the animal sacrifices, temple ordinances and purification rituals (Ac. 7:44; Heb. 8:5; 10:1; Ex. 25:40). Admission to the first covenant was through physical circumcision (Gen. 17:10-13; Ex. 12:48). However, the physical temple system and the shedding of animal blood could not permanently remove sin and offer everlasting life (Heb. 9:11-15; 10:1-4). Instead, the sacrificial law was given as a schoolmaster or disciplinarian intended to remind us of our sins and bring us to Christ, the perfect sacrifice, that we might be justified (Gal. 3:24).

Due to man's stubbornness, lack of faith and rejection of God's authority (Rom. 8:5-11; 9:30-33), God had determined long ago to make a new covenant according to His appointed time. This would provide a permanent means of reconciliation if its conditions were met (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:6-13).

The new covenant was introduced by Messiah through the symbolism of the Lord's Supper and realized at his death with the shedding of his blood (Mt. 26:28). This was the moment the sacrificial system was fulfilled (Mt. 5:17).

It is thus a fact, that the New Covenant and the Old Covenant are one agreement with two parts. The first was ratified by animal blood (Ex. 24:8), the second by Christ's blood (Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20).

This aspect of the plan of God was the central purpose for the Father sending His son and the main reason for the New Testament. Jesus Christ was sent to fulfill the law (sacrificial system, Mt. 5:17), by offering his own life in our place. This satisfies the requirement of the law, making it possible for us to be judged righteous after living a life of obedience (Rom. 8:3-4; Ac. 5:32; 1Jn. 3:24).

Did the early church teach that belief in Christ Jesus is all that is necessary for salvation?

From Christ's own words in Matthew 7:21-23, we see the early church understood clearly that the responsibility of a true believer included obedience to God's law. Disobedience to God's instructions and an unwillingness to repent of sin results in death (Heb.10:26-31). Therefore, belief in Christ was only part of the requirement for salvation because even the demons believe he is the son of God and yet remain unsaved (Mt. 8:28-29).

Do the writings of Paul teach that Christians are not required to obey the law?

It is often concluded incorrectly that Paul taught the law of God is no longer applicable (Rom. 7:6). However, by reading Romans 7:7-12, we see that Paul is not referring to obedience to God's commandments. Instead, he is pointing out that the law required the life of the sinner (Eze. 18:4, 20) which is the debt Christ paid, releasing us from the penalty of the law (death; Col. 2:14).

As every human being faces the death penalty (Rom. 3:19, 23) and as Christ provided the necessary atonement through his shed blood to deliver us from this sentence (Heb. 9:22), Paul cautioned us not to go back and commit the same offenses that brought us to the point of facing death in the first place (Heb.10:26-31).

Paul's teaching that the sacrificial aspect of the law was fulfilled by Jesus Christ became a stumbling block for many of the religious authorities at that time (Rom. 9:30-33).

The difficulty that many have in understanding Paul's writings lies in the fact that he often used the term "law" in reference to the sacrificial ordinances of the physical temple system, not the commandments. The majority of Paul's writings that appear to do away with God's law are actually referring to either the law of animal sacrifice, circumcision, or the Levitical Priesthood, depending on the context, all fulfilled by Christ's death (Mt. 5:17).

God's people are now to become living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1), circumcised of heart (Rom. 2:29) and members of a royal priesthood as kings and priests (1Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6). Those who are converted become priests after the order of Melchizedek, under Jesus Christ.

Did the Early Church teach that the Law of Clean and Unclean had been changed?

The First Covenant ordinances requiring the sacrifice of certain animals to the One True God, prefigured the sacrifice of Christ who would come as an acceptable offering, thus fulfilling the law regarding the use of animals as a substitute for the sins of the people (Mt. 5:17 cf. Heb. 9:11-15).

The law which provides a substitute atonement (covering) for sin was known from the beginning of man's history (Gen. 4:3-5 cf. 8:20), and it preceded the law given at Mt. Sinai during the time of Moses.

The terms clean and unclean are used because only God can determine what is acceptable for his people to present when they come to worship before Him (Lev. 11; Dt. 14:2-20 cf. Isa. 65:1-4). God commanded that specific parts of clean animals were to be eaten by his servants the Levites (Ex. 29:26-28). Even animals deemed to be clean could be regarded as an abomination if they were offered with any noticeable defect (Dt. 17:1), because these animals were a type of the sacrifice of Christ who was offered without spot or blemish (Heb. 9:14; 1Pet. 1:19). In other words, Christ was blameless having committed no sin (2Cor. 5:21 cf. Isa. 53:9). Therefore, animals that were clean and without blemish were a type of the perfect sacrifice to come – Christ.

As clean animals were taken into the Temple for the purpose of being offered to God, and as these same animals could be eaten by God's people, they pictured an important spiritual lesson. That lesson teaches God's people to discern, on a daily basis, what God regards as clean or unclean, in other words, what God deems to be holy or profane. Unclean animals represent a sinful way of life which God's people are to avoid. When falling short of this ideal, they could offer a clean animal (i.e. something that represented being sinless) given on their behalf in order to reconcile them to God. Unclean animals are also a type of the fallen host of heaven (Mt. 10:1; Mk. 6:7; Rev. 18:2), who are to be avoided (1Cor. 6:18; Jas. 4:7).

As the physical temple system is no longer in effect, and true Christians now are the Temple of God (1Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20; 2Cor. 6:16), why would we introduce unclean meat into that temple?

Many people who claim to be Christian misinterpret Peter's vision in Acts 10, believing that God changed His law regarding clean and unclean animals, when in reality it confirms that the early church continued keeping this commandment as Peter himself stated (Ac. 10:14). God used the spiritual principle behind unclean animals to show the early church that Gentiles, who were previously regarded as unclean, are now regarded as clean (Ac. 10:15-16; cf. Mt. 15:21-28), and can be grafted into the spiritual nation of Israel (Rom. 11:11-36).

In Mark 7:15-23, Christ describes the digestive process which cleanses impurities in food and eliminates waste, explaining that sin is not caused by physical things such as dirt on the hands (which the digestive system cleans out), but rather, the thoughts and actions which proceed out of a person. Messiah did not here "declare all foods clean" as is suggested by some altered Greek manuscripts. Firstly, Christ did not speak or do his own will but his Father's only (Jn. 5:30; 6:38). Secondly, the laws concerning clean and unclean meat (and all of God's Laws), remain intact as God does not change (Mal.

4:4) and as Christ himself said; cf. Mt. 5:17-19. Thirdly, the vision of Peter removes any doubt that the law remains as the vision pertained to Gentiles formerly considered unclean by the Jews and not to unclean meat.

If Christ were to advocate changing his Father's law regarding clean and unclean meat, he would have sinned and not qualified as an acceptable sacrifice.

How did the early church understand the change in the Law?

For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law (Heb. 7:12).

As it has been determined, the Bible states every word of God is considered the law (Mt. 4:4). Therefore, when God enacts a change in His delegated structure of authority, it is noted in His word.

From before the foundation of the earth, God determined mankind would require a covenant with two phases in order to understand His will and enter His kingdom (Mt. 25:34; Rev. 13:8; Heb. 4:3-11). These phases involve changes that deal with the misconduct of individuals, groups, and nations (Prov. 16:6; Jer. 26:13; Eze. 6:1-14; Mal. 3:13-15; Zec. 8:13; Mt. 23:1-36; Rom. 11:11ff; 2Pet. 3:9).

Almighty God states He does not change (Mal. 3:6), but because He is merciful and knows that man is weak (Rom. 8:3-4), He permitted certain allowances (Ac. 14:16; 17:30; Rom. 11:29-36). Christ described this truth very clearly in the book of Mark,

And the Pharisees having approached were questioning him if it is lawful for a man to divorce a woman, testing him. ³But having answered, he said to them, "What did Moses command you?" ⁴And they said to him, "Moses permitted to write a certificate of divorce, and to release." ⁵But Jesus said to them, "Toward your hard heart he wrote this command, ⁶but from the beginning of creation, male and female he created them; ⁷on account of this, a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸and the two will become one flesh; so that they are no longer two but one flesh. ⁹What therefore God has yoked together, let no man separate. ¹⁰And in the house again the disciples were asking him about this. ¹¹And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. ¹²And if a woman releases her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." (Mk. 10:2-12, RNT).

As the Aaronic/Levitical priesthood, including the later Pharisees and Sadducees (Mt. 3:10), persisted in their disobedience to God's clear instructions, and since the animal sacrifices could not take away sin (Heb. 9:9, 12-14), this priesthood was replaced by the order of Melchizedek, under Messiah. Christ qualified as High Priest of this new order through obedience to his Father's divine instructions, culminating in his willing sacrifice (Heb. 7).

The transfer of authority from Judah and the Levitical priesthood (Sanhedrin - the council of 70, Mt. 26:59, cf. Num. 11:16-17) is represented by Christ appointing seventy (plus two) disciples and sending them out to continue God's work (Lk. 10:1-3, 17). This work is now the responsibility of, and undertaken by, those of the church which Christ built (Mt. 9:37-38; Jn. 4:34-38). This change of authority is also pictured in Christ's interaction with the fig tree (Mt. 21:19; Lk. 13:6-9 cf. Jer. 24:1-10; 29:15-17). Even the fallen host (demons) understood the authority of Judah and the Levitical system had been removed (Ac. 19:13-17). Thus, to assert that Judaism continues to hold the oracles of God is fallacious. This is evident when one compares the traditions of Judaism, including the incorrect Hillel calendar and its unbiblical postponements, with scripture (Ti. 1:13-16).

Therefore, the priesthood still exists today but is different from that of the Aaronic/Levitical system. God's people now serve as priests of Melchizedek within the structure of the New Covenant. The change in the law did not remove the requirement for a priesthood, neither did it remove the responsibility of God's people to continue obeying His law and commandments today (Rev. 5:10; Mt. 5:17-19; 19:17; Rev. 14:12; Isa. 2:3; 8:20).

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man (Eccl. 12:13).

When Almighty God first gathered His people Israel, He established them as a nation led by the Angel of Yahovah, under the authority of God, the Father (Ex. 14:19; 23:20; Isa. 63:9; 1Cor. 10:4). At Sinai, Israel was given God's law, commandments, statutes, judgments, and ordinances, as part of the system under which they would function as His people (Ex. 19, 20). Included in the law of God are commandments and judgments concerning crime and punishment that were observed and executed by the Israelites under Moses, and later, under the judges (Ex. 21-23). This system was a theocracy, that is, a nation governed by God through the Angel of Yahovah, and administered through a human priesthood and judges (Ex. 18:17-26).

Almighty God does not establish law and commandments by whim (Ps. 19:7; 119:151; Jas. 1:22). He is perfect and eternal, hence His words and actions are deliberate, perfect and eternal, therefore His divine law and commandments are deliberate, perfect and eternal (Dt. 32:4; 2Kgs. 17:37; Ps. 105:8; 119:44; Rom. 16:26).

The fact is God's people walked according to His law in righteousness and justice many years prior to the exodus of Israel and the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai (Gen. 5:22; 6:9). Abraham, for example, was instructed to teach his children after him in righteousness and justice and to keep the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19). His descendants include all of Israel who eventually would be too great to number – like the sand of the sea, for they also include all spiritual descendants according to the promise of God (Gen. 32:12; Gal. 3:26-29).

Unfortunately, ancient Israel was influenced by the nations around them and their pagan-based systems of government. This led to Israel's desire to have a human king over them rather than the Anointed of God - the Angel of Yahovah. Before granting Israel's wish for a human king, they were informed by God through the prophets that a king would introduce many negative and burdensome changes (1Sam. 8:1-22), some of which were contrary to the law of God. Their decision would ultimately lead to Israel's rebellion and subsequent capture, imprisonment, and disbursement under the hands of their enemies.

Within the second covenant system, those who constitute the servants of God are not determined by nationality or ancestry, rather, the congregation of God is determined by God's calling and election (Mk. 16:15; Gal. 3:26-29). Now each chosen individual is a priest who carries the personal responsibility of administering the will of God in their own lives, in a world we are not to be a part of (1Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:5; 5:10). Therefore, the body of Christ or church of God includes people from many nations, languages, and regions (Rev. 5:9; 7:9). Consequently, God's servants recognize Jesus Christ as the Head of the church and king of kings, but as a people we are no longer a physical theocracy whose members are determined by ancestral lineage (Gal. 3:26-29).

However, as mentioned previously, all of mankind is now governed by a system that runs contrary to many of God's laws. This makes it very difficult to fully administer certain aspects of God's law pertaining to governance, which would include certain legal judgments (i.e. Num. 35:16-21; Lev. 20:27; 24:13-16; Dt. 13:6-10; 21:18-21; 22:13-29).

Nonetheless, the spiritual principles behind the legislation and indeed, all of God's commandments still apply. It is only under Jesus Christ during the millennium (Rev. 20:4-6) that God's people will be able once again to fully administer all of God's laws, including judgments pertaining to crime and punishment. Until that time, God's servants apply His commandments while seeking to fulfill the spiritual principles of His laws wherever possible.

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor. 11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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