



What We Believe

*A Layperson's Guide
to Wesleyan Theology*

David A. Case

WHAT WE BELIEVE

A Layperson's Guide to Wesleyan Holiness Theology

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PREFACE

There is great strength in the power of belief. This is evident from the words of Jesus when he said: "All things are possible to him who believes" (St. Mark 9:23). An individual's belief system is the inner force of right living. This is particularly true for the Christian. What we believe becomes the dynamic for life and service.

There are three fundamental questions that must be addressed in terms of one's belief system. First, what do you believe? Secondly, why do you believe what you believe? Thirdly, can you articulate your beliefs in such a way that will communicate to others your important set of beliefs? This book is an attempt to highlight what we believe in reference to certain key theological items. The intended audience would be that audience identified with Wesleyan theology. Evangelical Christians from a variety of theological persuasions may find the contents interesting as well. It is the intention of the book to present theological material in such a way that every Christian can clearly understand theological truths and be able to articulate these truths to others.

WHAT WE BELIEVE...ABOUT GOD

Biblical Background

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him ? As for the idol, a craftsman casts it, a goldsmith plates it with gold, and a silversmith fashions chains of silver. He who is too impoverished for such an offering selects a tree that does not rot; he seeks out for himself a skillful craftsman to prepare an idol that will not totter. Isaiah 40:18-20

There are, of course, many Scriptural passages that speak to the concept of the biblical God. The three passages that have been selected have important truths concerning belief in the GOD as revealed in both the Old and New Testament. The first text reminds us that the Bible does not offer any argument for the existence of God. There are no philosophical proofs for His existence. The text simply states that He created the heavens and the earth! The existence of God is taken for granted.

The second text reminds us what the Old Testament people of God were to know about their God and how they should respond to Him. This text is, to be understood against the backdrop of the surrounding cultures of their day. The People of God lived among a culture that had their own belief system. The gods of these peoples were many, thus the name given to their religious system is polytheism. In contrast to the polytheistic systems of the surrounding cultures with names given to their many gods, Israel was reminded that their God was "the Lord." There was something very special about "the Lord," and that is the fact that He is one! The term for a belief system in one deity is monotheism. Christian faith is built on the belief that their God is one, not many. The expected response to this monotheistic deity is to love this God with all of one's heart, soul, and might.

The third text offers a contrast between the deities of any polytheistic system and the monotheistic God of Israel. And what a contrast it is! The term for the deities of polytheism is the general term idol, or graven image. This graven image can be very elaborate, such as gold or silver, or very simple, made out of wood. An image fashioned out of gold, silver, or wood is simply an image. This image can not talk, think, plan, recall the past or predict the future. In contrast the Lord God of Israel has all the characteristics of personality. These traits are outlined in Isaiah, chapter forty, verses twenty-one to twenty-six.

Explanation of the Concept

What do we believe about the Lord God? We believe, first of all, that this is a very important question. J.B. Phillips wrote a powerful book entitled, *Your God Is Too Small*. It revealed to a general public that their view of GOD was too limited, too small. Their concept failed to fully reach the heights of the God of both the Old and New Testament.

We are all aware of the Gallup polls which indicate the religious understanding of the American people. Sometimes the response may reach to an eighty percent favorable rating in response to the question: "Do you believe in God?" With an eighty percent positive response, you would think that the current generation would be one of the most righteous, God-fearing generations in American history. But the question should be asked, "What type of GOD do you believe in?" When this second question is asked, one begins to understand that the deity that people believe in and the Lord God of the Bible are two different entities.

This is apparent when one begins to contrast various belief systems that are identified by ending in "ism." Atheism would be the denial of the existence of God. It is to be debated if someone really is an atheist, or if it is simply the "in" thing to say. In addition to atheism, there is pantheism which states that God is everything and everything is God. God is in the trees, the grass, the earth. God is everything and everywhere. The religions of the Far East are representative of this type of belief system.

Another one of the "isms" would be deism. Deism is the belief that God created the world and then left the world to run on its own energy. The world of the deist is one of cause and effect. For everything that happens, there is a logical explanation. God will not, and, in fact, cannot intervene in the activities of our world. Simply stated, this is a belief in God without the supernatural, without the miracle element.

An excellent example of deism can be found in the Jeffersonian Bible. Thomas Jefferson, our third President, was a deist. The Jeffersonian Bible is Jefferson's edition of the Gospels with all the miracles removed because a deist believes that the world has been flung into space to run on its own devices. God cannot intervene and produce a miracle. Such is the belief of a deist.

In contrast to these various "isms," we believe in the God as described in the Old and New Testament. This is known as theism. There are three basic beliefs in theism. The first belief is that God is both beyond and at the same time in the world. Once we state this first belief, we acknowledge something very amazing about Christian faith. It involves the use of paradox, the appearance of the seeming contradiction. If we are going to commit ourselves to theism, we must be capable of working with two concepts that appear to be contradictory at first, but on later reflection, are both correct.

To say that God is beyond the world means that we believe that God is distinct from this world. His ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. God is the Wholly-Other. His knowledge, personality, and understanding are beyond us. There is a very important word for this understanding of God, transcendent. One of our problems is making God too common, too ordinary. A belief in a transcendent God will help us keep from this error. When we say that God is beyond our world, we are committing ourselves to an infinite, all-powerful God. God is not limited by what it means to live in a space-time world.

When we say that God is in the world, we underscore the fact that He sustains the

world He created. He keeps our world going. If we remove God and His energizing presence from the world, this world would cease to exist as we know it. There is an important word that we associate with God in our world. He is a God who is immanent.

The second core belief in theism is that God created the world ex nihilo. At this point, it gets a little philosophical, but we can understand it. Creation ex nihilo means "created out of nothing." This belief means that at one time nothing existed except God. There wasn't God and some junk floating around. There was just God, alone. And God, out of nothing, created the universe.

The contrast between God and the world is the contrast between what is necessary and what is contingent. God is a Necessary Being. God is the One who cannot not be. We have just used a double negative which means that a positive end must result. God must be! Nothing else is necessary. Everything else is contingent, which means cannot be. There is only one way for things that can not be, to come into existence. They must be created!

There is a third concept to a belief in theism. That belief is that God is supernatural. God is a God of miracles. We believe that we live in a world of certain laws. There are appropriate results that come from certain causes. But we live in an open universe, which means that God can intervene into this world if and when He chooses. When God does intervene into our world, it is for His special purpose. This is what we mean by "miracles." The deist and the naturalist believe that we live in a closed universe. God, if indeed He exists, is shut out of our world. There is no intervention into our lives. There is no supernatural. Theism rejects this pessimistic view of our world.

Questions For Discussion

1. Why is it necessary to turn to the Bible for our understanding of God?
2. Do you find it unsettling to discover that the Bible makes no effort to prove God's existence?
3. Why do you think most Americans profess a belief in God?
4. Deism emphasizes the transcendence of God. Pantheism emphasizes the immanence of God. Theism emphasizes both! Why?
5. Transcendence vs. immanence. It's not either/or but both/and. Is this both/and way of speaking about God difficult?
6. Theism believes in creation ex nihilo. What does this mean?
7. What does the theist mean by "miracle?"
8. Can you identify some points in history where God intervened in the ordinary course of events to accomplish His purpose?
9. Is there anything on the horizon of human history that makes you think that God will intervene once again?

WHAT WE BELIEVE...ABOUT THE BIBLE

Biblical Background

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers, in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Hebrews 1:1-2

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of the joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16

We begin once again with a few brief remarks concerning these Scripture texts. The first text reminds us that "God speaks!" When we considered, "What We Believe about God," we noted that Isaiah 40:18 contrasted the living Lord God with graven images made of gold, silver or wood. The graven images were dumb idols. They could not speak, nor could they recall history, nor predict the future. The Lord God is a living Personality and he possesses all the qualities associated with living persons.

This text reminds us that God has taken the initiative to communicate to His people many times and through many methods. The prophets of the Old Testament were the prime examples of those used by God to communicate divine truth. All previous acts of communication simply prepared the way for God's final act of revelation through His Son Jesus Christ.

God revealed Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself stated: "He that has seen me, has seen the Father" (St. John 14:9). This revelation of God through Jesus Christ is God's final act of revelation. After looking at the life of Christ, if people fail to understand what God is trying to communicate to His people, there does not yet remain a further revelation from God. This is His last revelation!

The second text reminds us that this communication from God is alive. It is active. It contains power to accomplish God's intended purpose. We would expect that a living God would communicate a living, powerful Word. This is exactly what we needed.

God's Word can penetrate to the interior of our heart. It will pierce and divide. It will judge and correct. It will make us into the kind of people that God wants us to be.

The third text reminds us of two concepts. First, the method that brought this Word

to mankind is called inspiration. God's communication is inspired. What we identify as the Word of God is not simply the words of men. Rather, holy men of old were inspired by the presence of God to communicate His Word to mankind. That makes this Word very profitable.

The second concept from this text is the important part Scripture plays in our development and service. God's Word is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training. This indicates the value of God's Word. The end result will be that mankind will be adequate and equipped for good work. While God may simply enjoy communicating to mankind, His Word really has a deeper intention. There is work to do for the kingdom of God. God's revelation to us enables us to be adequately prepared for this work.

Explanation of the Concept

The importance of this concept cannot be overstated. For the Evangelical, there is no greater source of spiritual truth than God's revealed Word as found in the Old and New Testament and as illustrated by the life of Jesus Christ. In this revelation we find what we need to know in regards to how to get from where we are to where we ultimately desire to go, which is heaven. It was said of John Wesley that he was a man of one book, his Bible. This topic is of utmost importance for all Evangelicals.

Notice the tie between what we believe about God and what we believe about the Bible. Because we believe that God is a living, personal Being, we believe that He has taken the initiative to communicate divine truth to us. This is exactly what we would expect from such a God as this. In the words of a book title by Francis Schaeffer, He is There And He Is Not Silent!

What we believe about the Bible begins with clear definitions about what we mean by revelation and what we mean by inspiration. The word revelation implies that something is hidden and will remain so unless it is revealed. Revelation is that act of God whereby He makes Himself known to mankind. God, who is above the world, would remain hidden and a complete mystery if He did not take the initiative to reveal Himself to mankind. Revelation is God's self-disclosure. We are dependent on this revelation.

The second word that requires a clear definition is the word inspiration. This key word answers the question of the accuracy of revelation. To the question, "How can one be certain that God's communication is exactly what He wanted us to know?" comes this answer. It is accurate because of inspiration. By definition, inspiration is that work of the Holy Spirit that enables mankind to comprehend the revelation of God. The prophets in the Old Testament were inspired to comprehend the mind of God and to accurately transmit His Word to us. Due to their inspiration, they faithfully, accurately, communicated, "Thus says the Lord."

The inspiration process is, first of all, from the mind of God to the prophetic writer. The prophet accurately comprehended the mind of God. Then, the prophetic writer was inspired to accurately speak God's Word to his particular audience. The end result is that in the Holy Bible, the inspired Word of God has come to us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This Word is exactly what God wants us to know and believe.

The implication of these two definitions is that the Wesleyan Holiness Movement believes that the Bible is the Word of God. The little word "is" becomes the key word. Some would say the Bible contains the Word of God along with errors, mistakes of man. Others would say that the Bible becomes the Word of God under certain conditions. An Evangelical would state that the Bible is the Word of God. We mean by this that the Bible is the pure, objective Word of God just as the writings of Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher who died in 1804, are his words. They are the word of Kant even if no one understands his writings, or has even read his writing. The same for the Bible. It is the pure, objective Word of the Lord God.

This revelation from God is not an exhaustive revelation. We might like to know more about the creation process, the birth of Christ, or the concept of the Trinity. This is not an exhaustive revelation but it is everything we need to know for faith and godly living. Everything we need to know is found in this Book!

Evangelicals have a name for this particular view of Scripture. It is known as the Verbal-Plenary view. The word verbal means that the very words of Scripture are what is inspired. It will not do for some to suggest that God provided the idea or concept and left it to the human writer to work out the details of what was to be revealed. The very words are God-breathed! The word plenary means, "full." We believe that the inspired Word revealed to the writer and faithfully recorded for us to read, gives a full and complete record of what God wants us to know. The end result of this view of Scripture is that we believe the Bible to be the Word of God through the words of men!

There are some very practical implications for us from this view of Scripture. If what we say we believe about the Bible is, in fact, what is true, then the Bible must have primacy in our personal life and in the life of the Church. There is no other document that is as important as the Bible. It alone contains God's revelation to mankind. Without the Bible the human speaker has nothing to say. They are left to utter good advice. Without the Bible, preaching becomes mere moralistic teaching.

Questions for Discussion

1. Could you explain to someone how what one believes about God will impact what one believes about the Bible?
2. What is the difference between revelation and inspiration?
3. What is the difference between saying either the Bible contains the Word of God, or becomes the Word of God, and stating the Bible is the Word of God?
4. An Evangelical believes that the Bible is the Word of God through the words of men. What does this mean?
5. If the Bible is the Word of God it must have primacy in our life. Suggest some practical ways the Bible can have its primary place in one's personal life.
6. Suggest some practical ways the Bible can have its primary place in the preaching and teaching of the local church.

WHAT WE BELIEVE...ABOUT OUR WORLD

Biblical Background

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female, He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth..." And God saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good.

Genesis 1:27-28; 31

By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Genesis 2:2-3

The Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and to keep it.

Genesis 2:15

For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Genesis 2:24

These four texts are from the very beginning of Genesis. They give us some very important information about the world God has created. The first text reminds us that all of the creative work was accomplished by God. He brought everything into existence, ex-nihilo, or out of nothing. This included humankind. This text also provides the reader with God's evaluation of what He had created—it was very good! No matter what may come later in the story of humankind, and no matter how they may turn out, it was noted from the beginning that all of God's creation was very good.

The second text is the record of the establishment of the Sabbath ordinance. God worked six days and rested on the seventh. He set it apart and made the seventh day holy by resting from all His work. This text illustrates God's intended pattern for all to follow.

The third text reminds us that Adam was to work out his obedience to God in the garden of Eden. Adam lived in paradise. He was given honorable work to accomplish; to cultivate and to keep the garden.

The final text provides the reader with the information that humankind was created to live in community and not in isolation. The family unit becomes the basic model for relationship. The emphasis on community relationship will be further developed as more revelation is given.

Explanation of the Concept

What do we believe about our world? One answer to this question might be that the Evangelical is not very concerned with the condition of this world. In the words of some, we might be so heavenly minded we are no earthly good! To the extent this may be true, it is unfortunate. The individual who takes the early verses of Genesis seriously should have a deep concern for God's created world. This is so, simply because God pronounced His blessing on His created world—it is very good. What God calls good should not be dismissed as unimportant.

God's announcement, "It is good," applies to all of creation, including humankind. Adam and Eve are given a blessing from God and given specific instructions: be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The first thing we believe about our world is that it is God's gift to us which we are to use and enjoy.

The next thing we believe about our world is that God has set His line of division on it. In terms of days, not every day is the same. This is indicated by the fact that God worked six days and rested the seventh. The "work" was His creative act of bringing everything into existence. The "rest" was not due to the fact that God was tired! He intended to show humankind that not all "days" are the same. One may work six days, but the seventh is different.

What makes it special? The unique aspect of this seventh day is because God blessed this day and sanctified it, or set it apart. This unique aspect is illustrated by God, the first One to observe Sabbath. His pattern is simply this, one doesn't do on the seventh day what they have been doing for the previous six days. God observed this pattern and invited humankind to follow this example.

Some would make this a division into the secular and the sacred. By that they would say some things are secular in nature while other things are sacred. This is not how we understand this division. God is the author of all of life, both secular and sacred. God wants us to enjoy all of life, as a person who follows their Creator's example. Abraham is an example of this in his own experience. In the early stage of his journey of faith we read:

And Abram moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

Genesis 12:8

Here we see Abram engaging in two activities and both are important. First, he pitched his tent, meaning he attended to the necessary affairs of life. God is interested in those affairs also. It is perfectly within God's perfect plan for humankind to be mindful of the everyday issues of life, the so-called secular issues of life. But he did something else as well. Abram built an altar to the Lord. This is the spiritual dimension of life. This is important to God as well. The point is this: There is no sharp division between the two. Rather, God would have us integrate the two into a healthy life under God's pattern. The integration of faith with everyday life in our world is God's plan. The Sabbath observance is simply a reminder of the necessity of doing this. Every Sabbath observance becomes our testimony to the fact that we are endeavoring to integrate our life around God's pattern.

We believe something else about our world. We believe we are placed in a world that is conducive to life, and that each of us has work that we are intended to

accomplish. God has made humankind with the capacity to work and this labor is an honorable activity. Adam was instructed to cultivate the garden and to keep it. The aspect of cultivate captures the aspect of labor or hard work. We believe there is an innate urge to work and that humankind is most fulfilled when they engage in honest labor.

There is something more about Adam's placement in the garden. He was to keep it. This involved a stewardship, and accountability was required. One would think that the individual that takes the Genesis account most seriously would be the one that would be the most conscious of the environment and the need for conservation. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. We have all seen the advertisement of the anti-pollution campaign with the native American looking over the polluted land with a tear falling down his cheek. It is not only the native American that should weep over what has happened to God's created world. It should cause all of us to weep when we recall that what was once "very good" and was placed in our care, is now in grave danger of an environmental crisis.

There is something else we believe about this world. We believe that we were created for community and for meaningful relationship and not for individualism. The last few verses of Genesis, chapter two, reminds us that man cannot live just to himself. The created world is a world of relationship. This may be seen in all aspects of the universe and is surely clearly evident within the life of humankind. We are not here just for ourselves. There is a basic unit that God intends for the family. It is God's plan that a man will leave his own home, will cleave to his wife, and through a weaving process the two will become one.

Today we live in a culture that places the emphasis on the individual. We praise the one who "does his own thing." We have put emphasis on the rights of the individual to such an extent that we have weakened the group. We believe God had a different plan in mind when He created this world. He placed high regard for relationship, between humankind and Himself, and within human relations.

God's evident concern for relationship is developed throughout Scripture. What begins with a simple family soon becomes a patriarchal unit. It then extends to a people known in the Old Testament as Israel, the people of God. This concern for relationship ultimately becomes the people of God in the New Testament, the Church.

What we believe about the world is basic to life. We believe that God created a good world and gave humankind responsibility in it. We believe that the best way to enjoy this world is to integrate our faith with everyday life. This is best illustrated by Sabbath observance. We believe that work is honorable and we are to be good stewards of our environment. Finally, we believe that our world is a world of relationship and thus no one lives solely to himself.

Questions for Discussion

1. If we believe that God created a world that was "very good," how do we explain a good world that has apparently gone bad?
2. What is the best way to "observe" Sabbath?
3. Do you have any suggestions as to how one can integrate their faith with everyday life?
4. Do you think most people like to work? Is there anything fulfilling in good, honest, hard work?

5. Do you feel any responsibility for environmental concerns?
6. What can one do to illustrate the fact that they take seriously their responsibility to be a good steward of our world?
7. How important are relationships?

WHAT WE BELIEVE...ABOUT SIN

Biblical Background

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

Genesis 3:6-7

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—for until the law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

Romans 5:12-14

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 3:23

These three texts are some of the most important for any study of the concept of sin. The first text is from Genesis. It is important to remind ourselves that the Genesis text is very old. Also, it must be acknowledged that there is rich symbolism in this text. The garden of Eden symbolizes something. The serpent symbolizes something. The same can be said of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. The author utilized symbolic language to communicate deep theological truth. The fact that the text is very old and symbolic language is found in it must not color our appreciation for the truth of this statement. It is historically accurate and reflected the faith of the people of Israel as to how sin was introduced into our world.

Chapter three of Genesis must be read in light of the preceding two chapters. God has created the world ex -nihilo, and stated that "it is very good." This included man that was created in God's image. The image of God in mankind includes two distinct categories: (1) the natural image of God which includes everything that makes mankind what it is. The natural image separates Adam and Eve from everything else that has been created. A word that summarizes this type of image would be the term personality.

The natural image of God in man makes man a powerful being, capable of a multitude of great and wonderful things. But with this greatness comes the question, "Will man use this greatness always for the good?" This is why the second category of the image of God in man is so important. It speaks of how man will use his ability. We believe that Adam was created with a positive thrust to the good. We believe that Adam, prior to chapter three, always answered to the right. We also believe that he always eagerly sought to please God. We call this created holiness. Adam was created this way.

Whatever will happen in Genesis chapter three must be balanced with what God has already done. God has created Adam in the image of God, placed him in the Garden, and frequently visited Adam in the cool of the afternoon for companionship and worship.

But God did something else as well. He gave Adam a free will. By this we believe that Adam was capable of acting as he chose to act. We believe that Adam's will was able not to sin.

The second text reminds us that Adam was not acting solely on his own. In some sense Adam was our representative and all humankind would bear the results of whatever happened in Genesis chapter three. Romans chapter five tells us that through one man (Adam) sin and death entered the world. The result of Adam's one act caused death to spread to all men, because all sinned.

The third text tells us of the universality of sin. Very simply, all have sinned and come short of God's glory! There is no escape. Whatever Adam has unleashed on the world has contaminated the entire human race. All suffer the consequence of Adam's act.

Explanation of the Concept

Our explanation begins with a reminder of how important it is to gain the biblical perspective of sin. We dare not allow mankind to explain the concept of sin. When this happens, we lose the idea of sin.

Man calls sin an accident, God calls it an abomination
Man calls sin a blunder, God calls sin a blight
Man calls sin a chance, God calls sin a choice
Man calls sin a defect, God calls sin a disease
Man calls sin an error, God calls sin enmity
Man calls sin a fascination, God calls it fatality

We must turn to God's Word for our understanding of sin. When we do, we find that God created Adam holy, but not indefectibly so! By this is meant, Adam could use his freewill and do other than God's will. This is the only opening Satan could use to tempt Adam and cause sin to be experienced. The object of temptation would be an "apple" from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This sounds innocent enough but contains a great deal of theological possibilities. The symbol of the "apple" became the instrument through which Adam's appetite was awakened. As a human being, Adam had certain needs and appetites. The awakening of these appetites is what it means to be human. The awakening of the appetites is purely innocent and without penalty. What will Adam do with an awakened appetite? It is not true that any appetite awakened must be immediately satisfied. Satan would like us to think that was true. Adam's will could have withstood the temptation caused by the awakened appetite and not yielded to temptation. At some point in the third chapter of Genesis, Adam separated his will from God's will. Once his will was separated from God's will, the simple act of disobedience occurred. We believe that sin is a willful act of disobedience.

With this willful act of disobedience, certain results immediately followed. God had warned Adam that if he ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, "he would

surely die" (Genesis 2:17). We know from the text that Adam and Eve did not immediately die physically.

They lived for many years after this event. But something happened and they immediately knew it! In fact, they attempted to hide their nakedness by sewing a covering of leaves.

The penalty of death must be more than just physical death. We believe that Adam and Eve experienced a spiritual death immediately after their act of disobedience. They knew they had lost something; that they were naked. What they lost was their created holiness.

The text in Romans five tells us that through one man sin entered the world and death spread to all men. Adam was our representative. The effects of what happened to Adam passed on to all members of the human race. Recall how Paul describes that condition in Romans five. The fact of death becomes Paul's point of reference. Adam had a direct commandment from God—do not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil! When he disobeyed God's command, death resulted. The great lawgiver in the Old Testament is Moses. Moses brought the Ten Commandments to the people. Individuals may break one of those commandments, but they do so knowing that a penalty must be paid. But what about that time period between Adam and Moses? People still continued to die! Paul is very careful to stipulate that the people in that time period had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam. There was no law given. They could not, in a technical way, be guilty of disobeying a known law. And yet they died. There must be a second type of sin that has been unleashed on the world. There must be some way that people pay the penalty of sin without actually disobeying a law. We believe that this second category of sin is a state of sin, a condition of the heart, that is sinful. We believe we inherited this condition from our first parent, Adam. We call this condition, inherited sin, or original sin. We believe that it is passed on to all members of the human race. We believe that just as created holiness characterized Adam in his original constitution, so the condition of inherited sin is the common condition of everyone born into the human race.

The result of this is that we believe that sin is twofold. Sin is first of all acts of disobedience. Sin is the deliberate placing of my will against God's will and doing my own thing. Sin is a willful transgression of a known law of God. But sin is something else. It is a contamination of the human soul. It is the contagious disease that has corrupted man's nature. It is inherited from Adam and is the common condition of all humankind.

This is what we believe about sin. It is not a pleasant topic to consider but it is necessary. It is like going to the doctor's office. The doctor must correctly diagnose the sickness before a proper remedy can be prescribed. The same is true concerning sin. One's solution of the problem of sin will never go beyond what we believe the extent of the problem to be. This is why proper diagnosis is required. There is, however, good news. As expressed in the old song "Rock of Ages," "be of sin the double cure, save from wrath and make me pure." We can have confidence that God has a remedy for sin. This remedy is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Questions For Discussion

1. Summarize in a few words Adam's natural and moral constitution prior to Genesis

three.

2. How can a holy being sin? What must Adam do before the act of disobedience?
3. Describe Adam's relationship to all mankind and to Christ.
4. Provide a definition of sin that will cover its twofold character.

WHAT WE BELIEVE...ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

Biblical Background

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

St. John 1:1-2; 14

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.

Philippians 2:5-7

God has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.

Hebrews 1:2-3

These texts are three of the most important texts concerning the study of Jesus Christ. Each has unique information concerning Jesus that we need to know. St. John has an unusual way of beginning his gospel. He takes us to "in the beginning." John starts his account in eternity past, with the pre-existent Trinity. From John's description, we would gather that there are two members in eternity past: God and the Word. The term Word is interesting. From a Greek perspective, the Word refers to a principle of reason. It represents a starting point for all rational thought. The term also has a Jewish flavor. From that perspective, it indicates the dynamic life-giving activity of God. We are familiar with "and God said let there be..." The Word of God contained life-giving energy. Jesus Christ is that quality personified. There might be a combination of Greek and Jewish flavor in John's term.

However that may be determined, the point is that this Word always existed. The Word was there "in the beginning." Also, the Word was with God. The preposition "with" indicates personal existence alongside the Person of God. They existed as two separate personalities. Finally, the Word was God. This means the Word had the same divine qualities as did God.

This being said, we are not prepared for the grand surprise. This pre-existent Word, became flesh! The verb "became" indicates that the pre-existent Word who always was, became a human form at some point in history. The Word was incarnate, or made visible. When the text states that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," John means that the incarnation was a temporary situation. The incarnation was not meant to be a permanent condition.

Paul reminds us in Philippians that although the Word existed in the form of God, He

did not regard divinity a privilege to be held. The Word willingly laid aside His privileges, came in the form of a bond-servant, and was made in the likeness of humankind.

The Hebrew writer reminds us that Jesus Christ was a revelation from God. God was speaking to us from the life of Christ. This revelation tells us many things, but two are particularly mentioned: Christ is the radiance of God's glory, and the exact representation of His divine nature.

Explanation of the Concept

Based on these three texts, what do we believe about Jesus Christ? The answer to this question involves the doctrine of The Son. This doctrine includes the Person of Christ and the Work of Christ. We are interested now with the first aspect, the Person of Christ, which is known as Christology.

We only know about the Person of Christ from what we can discern from the four Gospel accounts. If we were dependent on secular sources for our knowledge of Jesus Christ, there would be little known. Since we are dependent on the Gospels for our knowledge of the Person of Christ, what we believe about the Bible becomes all important. When we examined the topic, "What We Believe About the Bible," we concluded that the Bible is the Word of God. We determined that the Bible is a faithful, accurate account of what God wanted us to know and believe.

Since this is true, we confidently turn to the written Gospels for information concerning Jesus Christ. When we do, we discover this fact: He who always was, became in human history. This is a very important sentence. The "was" quality of Christ means He was divine. He was a divine Person with a divine nature. The "became" quality of Christ means He had a human nature as well. What we come up with is this: The divine Person, with a divine nature, assumed a human nature for thirty-some years while He was here on earth. This is the mystery of the incarnation.

The concept of "two natures in one Person" is not an easy concept to consider. We should be encouraged by this thought. God is not trying to make it as difficult as He can make it. The only reason we have this concept is because it is a divine necessity. We say this because this is the only way God's intended plan for humankind can be accomplished. It was necessary for Jesus Christ to have both a divine nature and also a human nature. Why?

It was necessary because God has a plan to save a lost world. It will involve the willing sacrifice of one for the entire world. Who will be capable of being this one sacrifice? That one must be pure and sinless. If God could find some human being on earth that fits this description, perhaps that one could save a lost world. We recall however, from our study of sin, that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Thus, God will have to send someone into our world for the express purpose of being the one great sacrifice for a lost world. That is why Jesus Christ must have a divine nature!

The human nature of Jesus Christ is a necessity due to the fact that it was human beings that rebelled against God. It was humanity that refused to accept Him. Thus, humanity must bear the penalty for this sin. Jesus Christ will bear this penalty redemptively. His human nature will pay the price for all humankind.

It is sometimes pondered, what if the Son did not want to be involved in this great

plan. Paul reminds us that the Son, though divine, did not regard equal status with God the Father as something to hold. Rather, He emptied Himself of those divine privileges and willingly came to this world. He came in the form of humankind, but of the lowest type. He came as a servant! And He came knowing what the outcome would be. He came knowing that a cross was at the end of His life.

The Hebrew writer reminds us that the life of Christ is a clear revelation to us of God's perfect plan. As we read about the life of Christ, God is telling us about love, sacrifice, and His desire to save a lost world. We are reminded that Jesus Christ is God with us! He is the exact representation of God Himself. This brings us to the shocking alternative!

We have two choices. One, He is exactly who He claimed to be. He is the very representation of God. He is God in the flesh and thus deserves our worship and belief. Or, he is a fraud and perhaps mentally unbalanced. After all, Jesus did say, "He that hath seen me, has seen the Father" (St. John 14:9). We can not have it both ways. We can not reject the divinity of Christ and yet determine he is the best human being that ever lived! This is the shocking alternative. Either He is who He said He is, or he is a fraud! We believe that He is the Son of God.

The discussion of what we believe about Jesus Christ would not be complete without a brief comment about the creeds of the Church. Within a few hundred years of the formation of the Church, it was necessary for councils to meet to respond to heresy. The question being debated centered around the two natures in one Person. One type of heresy contended Christ was not really divine. The Council at Nicaea (325 A.D.) condemned such heresy.

Once the deity of Christ was affirmed, the question arose as to the relation in which the two natures in Christ stand to each other. Some heresies would deny the humanity of Christ, or make Him less than fully human. The Council at Constantinople (381 A.D.) and the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) established the full humanity of Christ. The result of these councils were creedal statements that clearly clarify both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus Christ. The Church Councils were responsible for the Orthodox view in regards to Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine, having two natures in one Person - "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation."

Questions for Discussion:

1. What is the difference between the Person of Christ and the Work of Christ?
2. Contrast John's method of introducing the ministry of Jesus Christ with the method used by the other gospel writers.
3. How would you explain the divinity of Jesus Christ to someone?
4. How would you establish the humanness of Jesus Christ to someone?
5. Why did Jesus Christ have both a divine nature and a human nature?
6. Explain the reason for early Church Councils and what they ultimately determined.

WHAT WE BELIEVE ...ABOUT ATONEMENT

Biblical Background

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

St. John 3:14-16

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.

Galatians 1:3-5

For by grace you have been saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

The three texts chosen to illustrate the concept of atonement are well known to every reader of the New Testament. The text from St. John's gospel begins with a reference to a situation from the Old Testament. The Children of Israel were plagued with bites from poisonous snakes. The bite was deadly. Moses was instructed to construct a rod with a serpent image at the top. He was to hold the rod above his head and instructed the people to look at the image when they were bitten by a snake. If they believed Moses' words, they would look at the rod and not die from snake bite. This incident is recorded in Numbers 21:9.

In the same way, God has provided a way for mankind to escape the penalty of sin. Jesus Christ will be lifted up on a cross and whoever believes in Him will have life eternal. This entire plan is motivated by God's love for a lost world.

St. Paul is the human author for the next two texts. In Galatians, he provided a theological understanding of that first Easter weekend. Paul reminds us that Christ freely gave Himself for a lost world. Paul reminds us that what Christ accomplished was for our benefit. There was a specific reason for Christ's death. It was to deliver us from our present evil age. Finally, Paul reminds his readers that this was all in accordance with the will of God.

In Ephesians, Paul provides key words to explain God's plan of salvation. This plan is due to the gracious will of God. Salvation is made possible by believing faith in the provision God has provided. Paul reminds us that human effort will play no part in this provision and thus there is nothing to boast about in regards to our ultimate salvation. It is all God's doing!

Explanation of the Concept

There is much that could be said about God's plan of atonement. First, we need a definition of atonement. The word is sometimes broken down into syllables: at-one-ment. This means that parties are at opposite ends of the spectrum and need to be brought together. This is the basic idea of atonement. God and humankind are far apart. Due to sin, man is an enemy of God, far away from God, and doomed to remain in that condition. God's provision is to bring man to Himself.

There is rich Old Testament background for this concept. We have already mentioned the scene in Numbers where God provided a way to escape the deadly snake bite. That is only to prepare us for the Levitical laws concerning sacrifices found in Leviticus, chapters 1-7 and chapter 16. The legislation for these sacrifices speaks to the innocent dying for the guilty. These sacrifices required specific steps to be followed. Whatever animal was to be sacrificed, the sins of the offerer was transferred to that animal. As clearly as could be seen, the innocent was dying for the guilty.

There are key terms that are helpful in any discussion of the atonement. The first term is substitution. Someone takes the place of the guilty. This is why Christ must have two natures. The divine nature was necessary so that His sacrifice would be sinless. His human nature was necessary so that His humanity could bear the penalty for lost humanity by substitution.

The second key term refers to the atonement as vicarious. The atonement was for others. It was on their behalf. This is what vicarious means. Christ had no sin Himself. He died for others and their sin.

We believe that the atonement had three distinct purposes. Each purpose is expressed by a certain word. The first word is propitiation, which means to appease the wrath of the offended party. God can not tolerate sin. While He loves the sinner, He hates sin. In light of man's sinfulness, the wrath of God is expressed. Atonement is to appease the wrath of God. If God's wrath is not appeased, the provision for sin will not be possible.

The second word used in regards to the atonement is redemption. This word implies that humankind is held in slavery. The only way to release humankind from this problem is for Someone to pay the redemptive price, and thus everyone will be purchased from the slave market of sin. As scripture teaches, "We are redeemed not by gold or silver, but by the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

The third word in reference to the atonement is reconciliation. This is needed because God and mankind are far apart due to sin. Sin created a wide gulf between both. The place of at-one-ment is the cross. It is there that parties are brought together. It is at the cross that reconciliation is made possible.

The question is often raised as to how the death of Christ on a cross can save from sin. We believe the answer to be centered around the word faith. God's provision for a lost world involves His Son dying in our place. God's plan requires humankind to believe in this provision and to accept this provision by faith. Faith in God's provision implies that mankind no longer has faith in any other possible way of escaping the penalty of sin. God graciously offers to us His provision for the curse of sin and we by faith accept this provision. Faith in the substitutionary death of Christ, vicariously given for all mankind, is what God wants to see in every individual.

You may sometimes hear it said that everyone is already saved, some just don't

realize it as yet. There is some truth to this statement. The death of Christ on the cross has sufficient merit to save this entire world. The cross could save ten lost worlds. Nothing else needs to be done. It is not a concern that there are too many people in the world and thus the cross will lose its saving power. The cross is God's provision for the sins of the world. The merit of the cross is sufficient for all. Nothing else remains to be done. This is known as objective atonement. Objectively, all mankind has been saved through the one cross event.

There is, however, another side to this question. We do not believe that all men will be saved. We might wish that were true, but our awareness of history and individuals tells us that some will not make it to heaven. The reason is because they have never expressed faith in the One dying on Calvary's cross. They have never believed in God's provision for sin. While from God's point-of-view, atonement is objective for all, the other side is that atonement is subjective. It must be applied at the individual level. This means that atonement is both objective and subjective.

The question is often asked as to the extent of the atonement. By this is meant, to what extent did God intend His provision to reach. Was it God's intention to extend His provision to all mankind or only to the elect? We believe that God's provision was extended to all. God loved the world of sinful individuals so much that He provided the provision of atonement for them. When we read that God is "not wishing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9), we believe that the any means the entire world. If God's provision is to be limited, it will be limited by man's refusal to believe in Christ and to put his faith in God's provision for sin. It will not be limited due to God's design or plan to save only some, the elect.

Questions for Discussion

1. Explain the Old Testament imagery for the atonement concept.
2. Provide a clear, brief definition for key terms like: substitutionary atonement, vicarious atonement, propitiation, redemption and reconciliation.
3. How is it possible that some-event 2000 years ago can affect my life in any meaningful way today?
4. On what basis is the merit of the cross applied to my heart?
5. What is the distinction to be made between objective and subjective atonement?
6. How would you describe the extent of the atonement? Another way to ask this question is to ask for whom did God design His provision for the atonement of sin?

WHAT WE BELIEVE...ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

Biblical Background

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.

St. John 14:16-17

These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

St. John 14:25-26

When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me, and you will bear witness also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.

St. John 15:26-27

But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you... But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth...

St. John 16:7; 13

Explanation of the Concept

The scripture texts chosen to introduce the topic of the Holy Spirit are from St. John's gospel. John is recording what is known as "The Last Discourse" of Jesus to his disciples. He has many things to tell them, but the most important topic relates to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

The first thing that must be established concerning the Holy Spirit is the fact of his personal subsistence and deity. We believe that the Christian faith involves a divine Godhead with three personal manifestations. God the Father is both personal and divine. God the Son is both a person and divine. The same must be established for the third member of the Trinity. The personhood of the Spirit is established by the following arguments.

Every Greek noun has a gender assigned to it, either masculine, feminine, or neuter. The gender for the Greek word spirit (*ipneuma*) is neuter. The noun, however, is not always used. Sometimes a pronoun is used in its place. Greek pronouns also have gender. It would be expected that the pronoun, when it refers to the neuter noun spirit, would be the neuter pronoun. Thus, we would expect something like, "the Spirit...it shall..." The Spirit is not an it! In every instance where the pronoun is used, the biblical writer used the masculine pronoun. Thus, we find such instances as, "the Spirit...he

shall..." The Holy Spirit is a person, not an impersonal force.

The personhood of the Spirit is also established by the fact that you can treat the Spirit as a person (pray to him, quench the Spirit, bless the Spirit), and the Spirit performs acts proper to personality—He speaks, commands, strives, to name a few examples.

The divinity of the third member of the Trinity must also be established. This can be done by noting the following. Divine names are given, (the Holy Spirit). Divine perfections are ascribed to Him, (omnipotence, omniscience). Divine works are performed by Him, (the resurrection of the dead, creation).

We also believe that the Holy Spirit is God's gift to His people. God knew that mankind was not sufficient on their own to accomplish what God intended His people to accomplish. The writer Luke concludes his gospel account with this instruction: "You are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Even the positive proof of the resurrection was not enough to ensure that the disciples and early believers would accomplish God's plan for them. They were not equipped for such a task. The question must be asked, "What is it that separates the Church from the very best of the various service organizations in this country?" The answer is, "The Church has been clothed by the power of the Holy Spirit!"

God knew we were not fully equipped for our task without the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. There are some things the Church can do without and still be the Church. But, the Church can not be the Church without the power of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Spirit is the one ingredient we desperately need in order to be the Church.

We not only believe that the Holy Spirit is God's gift to the Church, we also believe that the Holy Spirit is the giver of good things to the Church. What the Spirit gives to the Church is twofold. First, He gives the "Fruit of the Spirit" as described in Galatians 5:22-23. The fruit of the Spirit is expressed in nine character graces that are to characterize each Christian's life. The list includes well-known qualities like: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

It is a fact that some of these qualities may be seen in the life of the unconverted. One doesn't have to be a Christian to be kind. But, the unconverted does not express kindness from the same motivation or with the consistent frequency as does the Christian who lets the Holy Spirit express kindness through his life.

We do not believe that conversion will bring with it a complete personality makeover. There may well be some Christians whose personality will still necessitate the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life in order for you and that person to get along together. But that does not negate the fact that the Holy Spirit brings to every believer these character graces and they make the difference in relationships between Christians.

The second gift the Spirit brings to Christians is the "Gifts of the Spirit." The total number of gifts is taken from lists such as Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11-12; and 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. While the "fruit of the Spirit" is singular in number and every Christian should expect to have all nine, the gifts of the Spirit is plural in number. We believe that means that a Christian should not expect to have all of the gifts. Rather, the gifts are distributed by the Holy Spirit "...just as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:11).

We discover a strange thing when we start talking about the gifts of the Spirit. Not

everyone is comfortable with this discussion. When one begins such a conversation, they soon discover a degree of hesitation by some as if the topic is one we should not be discussing. It could just be that the enemy of the Church is counting on this. If the gifts of the Spirit are needed to accomplish God's agenda for His people, then any reluctance on behalf of His people to discuss these gifts only means we are refusing to use God's means to do His work.

The reluctance of some of the Church to discuss the gifts of the Spirit is probably due to disagreement over the meaning and purpose of some of these gifts. In truth, the Church is probably scared to discuss some of the gifts. The only way out of this predicament, is for the Church to engage in a thorough study of the biblical texts that teach about the gifts of the Spirit. We can no longer simply ignore this topic and assume we can accomplish God's work for the Church without His divinely ordained means to accomplish this work.

What do we believe about these gifts? We believe that the gifts of the Spirit must be distinguished from natural gifts or endowments. Just because someone has a natural gift for the piano, that in and of itself does not equate with a God-given spiritual gift. A musical performance, flawlessly performed, but without any indication of God's anointing on the performance, does not mean that ministry and edification will result. In fact, that flawless performance will probably bring attention to the performers rather than to God.

We also believe that there is a diversity of spiritual gifts. The frequent analogy of the Church as a body illustrates this point. The body is constructed of many members; everything cannot be the hand. The body must be more than a right foot. Thus, the human body is made up of many parts and the body is to operate in cooperation with all members. The same analogy works for the Church. There is a reason for diversity in the body of Christ, and that is because we are dependent on one another. We need each other.

We believe that spiritual gifts take their character from the positions which various members occupy in the Church. All ministry is God-blessed. No ministry is greater than another, from God's perspective. However, the gift or gifts a teacher in the Church School department needs will be different from the gifts needed by the pastor.

We believe that the gifts are exercised in conjunction with the Church. The gifts are to edify the Body, not draw attention to an individual. Anytime a gift brings attention to the individual rather than to God, it is being used improperly.

Finally, we believe that gifts are absolutely essential for the spiritual progress of the Church. Simply stated, the Church can not do what God wants the Church to do without the gifts God has ordained to be used.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you explain the concept of a divine Godhead with three personal manifestations?
2. Do you find it difficult to talk about the Holy Spirit?
3. How would you maintain the personhood and deity of the Holy Spirit?
4. Three years with Jesus, climaxed by the powerful resurrection, and the disciples are still not ready! Why?
5. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to the Church. Why?

6. Can you distinguish between "fruit" and "gifts" of the Spirit?

WHAT WE BELIEVE...ABOUT CONVERSION

Biblical Background

And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

St. Mark 1:14-15

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God."

St. John 3:3-5

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God... Much more then, having been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall live by His life.

Romans 5:1-2; 9-10

These texts introduce us to the great concept of Christian conversion. It is known by several names: being saved, born again, conversion. The text in St. Mark reminds us that repentance and being made right with God was the prime message of Jesus Christ.

The text from St. John's gospel is the familiar conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. This conversation becomes the background for "born again" terminology in connection with conversion. The imagery of natural childbirth and connecting this with spiritual birth is a key concept in John's mind.

The Romans text provides us with Paul's theological understanding of conversion. It is Paul that reminds us what exactly "we have" as a result of conversion. It is Paul that contrasts the old with the new: we were enemies; we now have peace. We were under wrath; now we are saved from wrath. There can be no doubt of the fact that conversion is the greatest event that can occur in the life of any individual. What do we believe about conversion?

Explanation of the Concept

We believe that conversion begins with the work of the Holy Spirit in one's life. The Holy Spirit is the administrator of God's plan of salvation. He is the One who applies the completed work on Calvary to the heart of individuals.

How is it possible for an individual that is known as a sinner to be saved? We

believe that "Sinner Sam" is spiritually dead, lost in trespasses and sin. We believe that he is away from God, inclined to evil, and that continually. How is it possible for "Sinner Sam" to get saved? We believe it is only possible through God's grace. Grace is defined as God's unmerited favor to mankind. This means we cannot earn salvation, and we surely don't deserve salvation. But there is something else about God's grace. Grace is enablement to respond to God. Dead men don't move towards God. Dead men don't seek God and want to change their lifestyle. The "Sinner Sam" of life is not seeking God. Rather, God is seeking him.

We believe that the Holy Spirit has been returned to the world as "the Hound of Heaven" and that He is out looking for every member of the human race. The Holy Spirit is doing everything He can do to turn mankind back to God. This is God's gracious act towards man. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, and with this gracious activity there is enablement to respond to the Spirit's work in one's life.

We believe that due to the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of every individual, even prior to conversion, that it is possible to think in terms of a state of grace before conversion. This is properly called a "preliminary state of grace" for the simple reason that it is prior to actual conversion. The theological term for this preliminary grace in one's life is prevenient grace, or grace that goes before conversion. "Sinner Sam" is to use this divine power, graciously given to him, and to move in a positive way towards God.

John Wesley noted that this grace is "free to all" and "free in all." No one will ever be able to stand before God someday and say that "I never received your grace," or "I never had a chance to respond to your overture of grace in my life." If one enters eternity without God, it will not be because they did not have grace, but because they did not use the grace that was extended to them. This is why this topic is so important.

The Holy Spirit works through prevenient grace in His pursuit of lost mankind. It is the intended work of the Holy Spirit to lead "Sinner Sam" up the steps of salvation and thus from the deadness of sin to new life in Christ Jesus. What are the "steps to salvation"?

We believe the first step of salvation is the call of God on one's life. By definition, the call is the work of the Holy Spirit that makes an individual aware of the fact that God is searching for them. This call can be indirect or direct. By indirect, we mean any opportunity the Holy Spirit can use to make God known to mankind. It may be through conscience, creation, events in history, the testimony of others, or the events in one's own life. The Holy Spirit can use any of these circumstances to indirectly make known to the individual that God is looking for them. By the direct method, we mean through the written Word of God. By reading the Bible "Sinner Sam" can be made aware of the fact that there is a God and that God is searching for all people.

We believe the next step to salvation is an awakening to one's lost condition. It may seem impossible to believe, but there are individuals who do not know that they are lost and away from God. They have somehow accepted the fact that their life is all that it can be and do not know there is a better way to live. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to make individuals aware of their lost condition.

We believe the next step to salvation is conviction. At this point, many individuals do not like to think of a God who delights in bringing conviction on lost mankind. They think a God of love wouldn't do something like that. But think of a medical doctor. A medical

examination may be a painful experience for the patient. Pain is the indication of sickness. There will be no cure without the identification of the problem and that may be very painful. We would expect the doctor to proceed, even if it hurts.

God must be allowed to do His work as well. The Holy Spirit produces in "Sinner Sam" a sense of guilt and personal wrong doing. A holy God holds "Sam" responsible for his actions. Our current society does not like to talk about personal wrong doing and responsibility. Everyone today is the victim; no one is personally guilty.

God demands that sinful mankind admit their wrong doing and acknowledge their guilt before God. That is the only way God can begin to radically change an individual's life. We have noted three steps so far: the call, awakening, and conviction. These do not make one a Christian. We all perhaps have known individuals who were under deep conviction for sin but never did become a Christian. There are two more steps to follow.

We believe that it is necessary for "Sinner Sam" to repent of his sins. Repentance is that work of the Holy Spirit whereby an individual expresses their intention to turn 180 degrees in their life and start to go in an opposite direction. Repentance is a dramatic change in one's life and conduct. "Sam," also by repentance, indicates his intention to continue in the state of penance an ongoing life lived towards God and not running away from God.

We believe the last step to salvation is saving faith. The passage we identify with this step is, "For by grace you have been saved through faith..." (Ephesians 2:8). The Holy Spirit helps "Sam" to put his faith in the atoning work of Christ on Calvary. This is a two-fold activity. First, it is negative in that one must reject all other attempts to salvation. There are many suggested ways for mankind to "get saved" today. "Sam" must reject all of them! The Holy Spirit must help "Sam" to see that "the way of the Cross leads home, there's no other way but this!" Having rejected all other ways to save himself, Sam must now place faith in the work of atonement on Calvary and believe that Christ's death was an atonement for his sin. This is saving faith.

It is interesting to contrast spiritual birth with natural birth. The birth of a child requires a nine month process. You can't and really don't want to rush this natural process. However, child birth is a crisis moment. Your birth certificate will note the exact month, day, hour and minute of your birth. We believe that spiritual birth is the same way. It is the end result of a process whereby the Holy Spirit is leading one up the "steps to salvation." This spiritual process concludes with a crisis moment known as conversion, new birth, or being born again.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do you think the Holy Spirit was not fully manifested until after Christ's death and resurrection?
2. Can you identify and explain the "steps to salvation"?
3. How important is it for a new convert to know these "steps"?
4. What is the value of a Christian knowing that each "steps" is a reality in their personal life?

WHAT WE BELIEVE...ABOUT ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION

Biblical Background

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

Ezekiel 36:25-27

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

2 Corinthians 7:1

Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Galatians 5:24

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved completely, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

These texts are some of the most important for an introduction to the concept of entire sanctification. Ezekiel 36:25-27 is important because it points to a day when God will do a new thing. He will bring about a new heart, a new spirit, new statutes, and a new desire to serve Him. This Old Testament text reminds us that entire sanctification deals with the interior of one's heart and life.

The text from Second Corinthians 7:1 speaks to the idea of bringing what God has started to a completion. We are admonished to "perfect holiness," or to allow God to complete what He has started at the time of conversion.

The text from Galatians 5:24 reminds us that not everyone is owned, controlled, and dominated by Christ. In that sense, not everyone belongs to Christ. This text also introduces the "crucifixion" terminology which speaks to both a process and a crisis experience.

The text from First Thessalonians introduces the phrase "sanctify entirely" into our vocabulary. This text also reminds us that God intended to minister to the whole of humankind, body, soul, and spirit. Finally, this text reminds us that Christ is returning to receive those who are "blameless." This speaks to the motivation of our heart and not to performance.

Explanation of the Concept

We believe that spiritual conversion is the greatest spiritual reality that one can ever know. We do not minimize the new birth just so we may magnify entire sanctification. Having said this, we do believe that because sin is a twofold problem, it is not entirely dealt with at conversion. We believe that "something" remains in the life of the new convert that must be addressed. Along with others identified in the Wesleyan tradition... We believe that original sin, or depravity is the corruption of the nature of all the offspring of Adam, by reason of which everyone is very far gone from original righteousness, or the pure state of our first parents at the time of their creation, is without spiritual life, and is inclined to evil, and that continually; and that it continues to exist with the new life of the regenerate, until it is cleansed by the work of the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion.

The fact that something continues to exist in the life of the new convert is not unique to the Wesleyan tradition. Most Evangelicals define sin in a twofold manner: rebellious acts against God and a depraved condition of the heart. Most Evangelicals agree that conversion addresses the problem of "sins committed" and believe that God is gracious to forgive sins.

This means, however, that something does remain. This fact leads to what some have described as "secondness theology." Sometimes it is inferred that Wesleyans are the "second blessing" people, as if we are the only ones who believe that something does remain. The truth of the matter is that most Evangelicals believe that something remains. They differ as to the time when God will deal with what remains.

Among Evangelicals, there are the following views. Some would say that death is the sanctifier. At death God will cleanse a depraved heart and make that heart ready for heaven. Others, would say that "at the hour and article" of death God will cleanse the heart. This is a theological way of saying that just before death God will do a divine work in one's heart and cleanse it from all sin.

A Wesleyan would believe that heart cleansing is possible anytime in this life. Now what is the difference between these three views? The answer may be seen when one considers the conditions that must be met for a heart to be cleansed from all sin. These include: (1) the love of God—Ephesians 5:25-27. We believe that entire sanctification, as well as everything else God wants to do in one's life, is motivated by His great love. (2) The blood of Christ—Hebrews 13:12. We believe that Jesus Christ shed His blood on Calvary to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We believe that "without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin." (3) The effective work of the Holy Spirit—2 Thessalonians 2:13. We believe that just as the Holy Spirit was at work in prevenient grace, and just as He led the sinner up "the steps to salvation," so the Holy Spirit will continue to lead the new convert in spiritual life and development. We believe that the work of the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential to all spiritual work and development. (4) The powerful working of the Word of God—St. John 17:17. We believe that the revealed Word of God is the quickening agent that brings conviction and makes known to the new convert what else God has for his life.

As we look at these four conditions, one might ask these questions. Are these four only available at the time of one's death? Are they only workable just prior to death? Why would one believe that? It would seem that these conditions are available at all times. If it would be shown that they were in fact only available at death or just prior to death, then entire sanctification would obviously be only for that time. We believe they

are available anytime in the Christian's life when two other conditions are met. And so to the four conditions mentioned above, we add (5) the faith of the believer—Acts 15:8-9. We believe that just as conversion is possible by "saving faith," so anything else God wishes to do in one's life is received by faith. If one doesn't have faith that they can be cleansed from a depraved nature in this life, they won't experience it in this life. (6) The cooperation of the divine and human wills—Hebrews 10:10. We believe that God wants to cleanse the heart from all sin. We also believe that the individual must want this and agree with God's will for his life.

We believe that the problem of secondness, the remaining of the depraved nature, can be addressed by entire sanctification. This is a spiritual experience just as real and climactic as conversion. What will be the result of experiencing entire sanctification? The Bible teaches three aspects of entire sanctification. First, there is a cleansing of the heart from all sin—Acts 15:8-9. This is Peter's testimony before the Jerusalem Council and states that the Holy Spirit had done a work in the hearts of Gentile believers, just as Peter had experienced on the Day of Pentecost. It is this fact of a heart cleansing, available in this life, that sets Wesleyan teaching apart from other Evangelical teaching.

Secondly, we believe that entire sanctification produces power in the life of the new convert in accordance to Acts 1:8. This power is for witness, service, and victorious living. This power is the anointing of God's Spirit on the believer and this anointing makes all the difference in one's life, witness, and service.

Thirdly, we believe that entire sanctification produces a pure devotion to God—Acts 4:18-20. We believe that entire sanctification produces a single-mindedness towards God. We believe that entire sanctification is not only a separation from sin, but it is also a separation to God, a setting apart.

We believe that the conversion event has set a pattern for all further spiritual development in that conversion was a process (going up the "steps to salvation") and a crisis experience (the last moment of spiritual deadness and the first moment of new life). The same is true of entire sanctification. From conversion on, the Holy Spirit is making the new convert aware of their internal need. This may be a process over a period of time. This is where Paul's crucifixion terminology becomes important. Death by crucifixion is a process, but it always ends in death. We believe that the Holy Spirit from conversion onward is trying to make it clear that "something remains" in the heart of the new convert. The Holy Spirit wants to bring the new convert to a place where he will know that last moment of a depraved nature and the first moment of a clean heart. We believe this is entire sanctification.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you understand the quote on pages 50 and 51 that speaks to "something remaining" in the life of the new convert?
2. How would you explain the concept of "secondness"?
3. Do you understand that Evangelicals differ as to the time when secondness issues will be addressed?
4. Can you explain the conditions for entire sanctification?
5. Entire sanctification accomplished three things in one's life. What are they?

WHAT WE BELIEVE...ABOUT LIVING A HOLY LIFE

Biblical Background

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh...But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law...If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16, 18, 25

Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.

Ephesians 5:25-27

Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

1 Peter 1:13-16

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 1:6-7

These four texts have been selected to illustrate what we believe about living the holy life. These texts are distinguished by having ethical commands that are to be followed. The use of the imperative command is the clear feature of ethical instruction. It is found frequently in regards to living a holy life. The text from Galatians speaks to three themes: walk, led, living by the Spirit. These represent three aspects of our daily experience. The reference to walk means our conduct as a Christian. The reference to being led refers to where we go for direction. The reference to living by the Spirit speaks to the union we share with Him.

The text in Ephesians speaks to several specific ethical areas that the Christian must guard. The importance of truth, and maintaining right relationships are especially mentioned. It is also apparent that failure in the daily walk gives the devil an opportunity to wreck our spiritual lives.

The text found in First Peter reminds us that there is a standard that is to be followed. We are called to a holy lifestyle, patterned after the holiness of God. It is to characterize our life here on earth and is not just a hope for eternity.

The text from First John reminds us that fellowship with Christ is a day-by-day process. We are to walk in light, just as He dwells in the light. This is by the power of the Holy Spirit, as the Galatians texts reminded us. If this is accomplished, we are

continually cleansed by His blood.

Explanation of the Concept

The previous chapter reminded us what we believe about entire sanctification. The topic in this chapter is what we believe about living the holy life. Both aspects are necessary, and of equal importance. The first speaks to an experience that is to be a reality in one's life; the second speaks to a life that is to be lived. Both aspects are vital for victorious Christian living.

The difference between these two aspects is a real difference that must be maintained. Entire sanctification is first of all, a cleansing from inherited sin, the depraved nature which we received from Adam. This cleansing refers to the aspect of purity. We believe that the experience of entire sanctification is a crisis experience because it refers to the last moment of depravity in the heart and the first moment of a heart cleansed from all sin.

The experience of entire sanctification is for a very definite reason. There is a life to be lived. While the momentary experience is vital to the believer, that is not the end of the story. We are to walk, be led, and live by the Spirit, and we believe this means that there is a holy life to be lived. This life, lived by the power of the Holy Spirit, becomes a life marked by maturity. As one lives the holy life, they mature in the things of God and become more and more Christ-like.

The contrast between purity and maturity is illustrated by the celebration of a couple who have been married for fifty years. The couple should be able to look each other in the eye and state that for fifty years their relationship has been pure. There has never been the occasion for anyone to question their love for each other and their fidelity to their vows. They would, however, be able to talk about the growing relationship that has blossomed between them over those many years. Their love for each other has developed and the years spent together has taught them many lessons and given them many rewards. This illustrates the difference between purity and maturity.

The same should be the testimony of every believer. They should be able to state that the number of years they have served God has deepened their love for Him and the Christian life they have lived has resulted in a mature faith and a Christ-like character.

Perhaps the point that some would use most often to disagree with the Wesleyan view on the holy life is the following. With our emphasis on entire sanctification and living the holy life, some have given the impression that "they had arrived spiritually." It is as if "we are so holy, God might as well take us to heaven now!" Correctly understood and articulated, there is nothing further from the truth. There is a holy life to be lived. The honest Christian is painfully aware of their weakness and areas where they fall short. In fact, it is probably the most saintly person that most clearly sees how far short they fall from Christ-likeness. It is probably the person trying to live as close to God as possible that finds themselves praying: "I need Thee, O, I need thee..." They are the ones that frequently state: "I'm pressing on the upward way, new heights I'm gaining every day..."

What is the difference between a shortcoming prior to conversion, and a shortcoming in the daily life of the entirely sanctified? We believe it is the difference of the heart and the motive that prompts any activity. Prior to conversion, the human heart

is filled with inherited sin, depravity inherited due to Adam's sin (Romans 5:12). What springs from that heart are sinful deeds (Matthew 15:18-20). At conversion the Holy Spirit enters the heart of the new convert, but the inherited sin remains there as well. The result is a spiritual condition where the Christian wants to do the right, but often finds something within him that keeps him from doing the right (Galatians 5:17). Paul refers to what has remained in the heart of the new convert as "flesh." We believe that sinful conduct is prompted by this sinful nature that remains even in the life of the new convert.

The experience known as entire sanctification is the cleansing of the heart from all sin. This means that there is nothing in the heart to prompt sinful conduct. There is only the presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the entirely sanctified. We believe that conduct that falls short of what pleases God prior to conversion and even after conversion produces guilt and blame-worthiness because it is prompted by a depraved nature. There will never be conduct as described in Matthew 15:18-20 in the life of the entirely sanctified. We believe that any action that does fall short of Christ-likeness is not prompted by a depraved nature and thus does not produce guilt and blameworthiness.

The Christian will find as they live the holy life that it will be a time of great spiritual growth and development. In fact, growth should be greatly accelerated during this time. This will be the time where spiritual disciplines are learned. This is the time when emphasis will be given to Bible reading, intercessory prayer, developing and using spiritual gifts, and a wide range of other spiritual exercises which God desires for each of us.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is the use of commands and imperatives appropriate in Scripture texts that deal with ethical themes?
2. "An experience to be gained; a holy life to be lived." It's not either/or but both/and! Explain this concept?
3. Do you believe the contrast between purity and maturity is a helpful contrast? How would you maintain equal stress on both?
4. Why do you think the most saintly of individuals is probably the one that senses their need of more of God in the life?
5. Do you think God is concerned more with perfect performance or the motive of the heart?
6. An action, prompted by a pure motive, may still fall short of God's perfect standard. Does guilt and blameworthiness result from such an action? Why or why not?
7. We believe that the Christian life is the disciplined life. What are some spiritual disciplines God desires for His people?

WHAT WE BELIEVE...ABOUT THE CHURCH

Biblical Background

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.

Matthew 16:18

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19-22

Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the Word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ.

Colossians 1:25-28

These three texts introduce us to the biblical concept of the church. The text from Matthew reminds us, first of all, that the term church only appears three times in the Gospels; all three from Matthew. Matthew's text is found in the conversation between Christ and His disciples concerning, "Whom do men say that I am?" It is Peter who responds, "Thou art the Christ!" This is more than the correct answer. This statement of faith becomes the foundation rock upon which the entire Gospel will rest. It is also the foundation for the concept of the church. In reply to Peter, Jesus stated, "I will build My church!" It is Christ who is the builder. He will surely build. The church results from a construction project. The church belongs to Christ; it is His church.

The next two texts are examples of Pauline teaching on the church. The text from Ephesians introduces the reader to some of Paul's favorite analogies for the church. The term "household" is an example. The strength of any house is determined by its firm foundation. The household of God rests on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the cornerstone! No wonder the hymn writer spoke of "How firm a foundation...."

The house of God is growing into a holy temple. This is Paul's second analogy. A temple is where a deity will reside. The deity will dwell within his temple. So it is with the church. The Holy Spirit finds a dwelling place within the church.

The text from Colossians introduces us to the mystery of God. The mystery was hidden for generations but is now plainly revealed. The mystery is that God has

included the Gentiles into His plan of salvation and Paul is the one who has the privilege of announcing this good news. The gospel is for every man as mentioned three times at verse twenty-eight. The church is for everyone!

Explanation of the Concept

We believe the word church is used in two different ways. First the church is the local, visible congregation of people. We believe in the visible church. We believe in the necessity of assembling together with a Bible-believing congregation. We believe in supporting such a congregation with our time, talents, and tithe. We believe in being accountable to the people of God; to duly elected Church leaders; to a pastor; to a denomination.

We believe the word church also has a second connotation. This second meaning is the church invisible. This is the "household" of God, the Body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the church. We believe this invisible church cuts across denominational lines. It cuts across ethnic, social, economic barriers. It includes everyone who believes in Jesus Christ and those who have repented of their sins. We believe that someday there will be a great multitude from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...(Revelations 7:9). This is the invisible church of God.

We believe that one does not join this invisible church, but must repent of their sins and, on the basis of salvation, is born into this church. The word church implies the "called-out" ones. First, we are called out from the world to gather around the cross of Jesus Christ. This is the aspect of repentance and conversion. At Calvary every one stands on level ground. At the foot of the cross, "There is neither Jew or Greek, neither bond or free, neither male nor female. We are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). All who accept Christ as their personal Savior are part of the invisible church.

But the church is not solely gathered around the cross. The "called-out" ones are sent back into the world as "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20). The invisible church is to be "the salt of the earth and the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-14). The invisible church thus becomes a key element in God's plan to evangelize a lost world. The church of God are those called out of a lost world and to the cross of Christ. In turn, they are sent back to a lost world as examples of God's redeeming work. In this respect, the invisible church becomes "the gathered-scattered" people. Gathered around the cross; scattered among a lost world.

We believe that Jesus Christ is the head of the invisible church. This implies that Christ is the leader of the church and the One all must follow. The image of Christ as "head of the church" fits one of Paul's key images of the church, the Body of Christ. The analogy implies that there is only one head, Jesus Christ, but many members of the body. We take our place within this body. Everyone does not occupy the same place or represent the same member of the body. Whatever may be one's particular identity as a member of the Body is not important. We are all part of the one Body of Christ. With Christ as the head of the church, He can truly say, "My church!"

We believe there exists a relationship between believers within the Body of Christ that becomes an accurate gauge for judging relationship with God. Membership in the invisible church cuts across denominational lines. It makes possible the unity of the

members and true Christian fellowship. There is no sense in talking about one's love for God whom we cannot see, and, at the same time, refuse to acknowledge the worth and value of our Christian brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 4:20).

We feel so strongly concerning the unity and love among the Body of Christ that we believe the local, visible church is an incarnation of the unity which exists in the mystical Body of Christ. The word "incarnate" means to make visible. Each local manifestation of the visible church should exhibit the unity and love of the Body of Christ.

We believe that the visible church has a specific function that only the church can accomplish. We believe that this function is a nurturing one. We have already seen that Christ will build the church. This demands an on-going, progressive, and aggressive program whereby the new convert is being turned into the mature Christian they actually desire to be. It is the church that will develop the "fruit of the Spirit" in the life of the believer. It will be the church that will enable the Christian to understand the "gifts of the Spirit" and to have these gifts developed so that the believer is empowered to do the work God would have them do. It will be the church that stimulates service and witness in the everyday world.

The function of nurturing may take several shapes and forms, but it must happen. No other agency is going to nurture the Christian and help them find their place as a viable part of the Body of Christ. If the church does not assume this responsibility, it won't get done. There is no end to the activities a nurturing church can be involved in.

We believe the invisible church is on the winning side. While the local, visible church may have its problems, the invisible church is a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle. We believe the invisible church is a victorious church and like a mighty army, it is capturing the strongholds of Satan. We believe the invisible church is God's ordained weapon and He is winning the battle over sin with the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why do you think there is so little mention of the "church" in the four Gospels?
2. Does the distinction between visible/invisible church seem reasonable?
3. What is meant by identifying the church as the "gathered-scattered" people of God?
4. The biblical teaching is that Christ is the head of the church. What does this mean?
5. What are some Pauline analogies that help illuminate the concept of the church?
6. In what way should the local, visible church incarnate the unity which exists among the mystical Body of Christ?
7. What is the function of the church? Why is it so important?

WHAT WE BELIEVE...ABOUT THE SACRAMENTS

Biblical Background

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, this is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me. In the same way the cup also, after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread or drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 11:23-27

And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized? And Philip said, if you believe with all your heart, you may. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Acts 8:35-38

These two Scriptures identify the two sacraments that are usually observed by the American Protestant Church. We believe that believer's baptism and the observance of the Lord's Supper are the two sacraments which Christ commanded us to observe.

The text which speaks concerning the Lord's Supper is from Paul. The way this text begins is a testimony to early church tradition. Paul reminds the church at Corinth that he delivered to them what he had previously received. This "receiving-delivering" phrase is Paul's way of telling the church how certain sacred truth had been preserved. The two elements in the Lord's Supper are bread and the cup. Both are rich in symbolism: the bread represents the body of Christ while the cup represents the shed blood of our Lord.

There are certain admonitions concerning this sacrament. The first is that this sacrament is in remembrance of Christ. Second, each time we observe the Lord's Supper we speak to the fact of His death and His promised return. Third, one must make certain they are in proper spiritual relationship with Christ. It is possible to take the bread and the cup in an unworthy manner.

The text from the book of Acts is an account of Philip the Evangelist and the Ethiopian Eunuch. This text reminds us that the sacrament of Christian baptism is believer's baptism. The eunuch had already confessed his faith in Christ and as a result of that confession, he is baptized by Philip. The fact that they "went down into the water" may suggest that the specific mode of baptism was immersion.

Explanation of the Concept

We believe that the preaching of the Word and the observing of the Lord's Supper and Christian baptism are the twin identification points of the Protestant Church. Whenever they become separated, something basic to Christian worship is lost. It was St. Augustine who defined a sacrament as "the Word made visible!" This means that not only do we "hear" the gospel proclaimed, but at the communion table we "see" the gospel enacted before our eyes. If it is true that human beings usually remember only a small percentage of what they hear, but recall a considerable higher percentage of what they see, then it becomes clearer why the proclamation must be accompanied by the visual demonstration of the gospel.

Building on St. Augustine's definition, the Christian Church has usually regarded sacraments to be both signs and seals. As a seal, the two sacraments solidify certain truths to the heart of each believer: 1) They signify the authentication of the proclamation of the Gospel in Scripture and sermon. 2) The careful obedience of doing what Christ commanded His church to do enables the individual to follow Christ's other commands. 3) The promises from the pulpit are sealed to the individual by the action at the communion table and the act of baptism.

The sacraments also serve as a sign. This implies the following: (1) An identification with Jesus' own ministry. As He didn't just talk, but rather He also gave visible signs of the presence of God's Kingdom, so we don't just talk. Christian faith demands something overt and observable from our commitment. (2) These two sacraments are outward signs of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ experienced inwardly.

More specifically, each sacrament can be discussed as both a sign and a seal. The Lord's Supper signifies the following: (1) the Lord's death—1 Corinthians 11:26. (2) The believer's participation in the crucified Christ—St. John 6:53. (3) The union of believers with one another—1 Corinthians 10:17.

What specifically is sealed at the communion table? We believe the following: (1) To the participant, the great love of Christ. (2) The personal assurance that all promises and riches of the gospel offer are theirs. (3) For the participant in the communion service, this serves as an act of profession. Participation serves as a witness to one's faith in Christ.

An important question in regards to the Lord's Supper is that of the "real presence of Christ" during the observance of communion. Historically, there have been four views. The Roman Catholic position is "the sacramental union in a physical state." In the bread and wine, the physical body of Christ is present. Within Protestantism, there are three contrasting views. The Lutheran view states that there is no physical change in the bread and wine. There is in the Lord's Supper, nevertheless, a mysterious and miraculous real presence of the whole person of Christ, body and blood, in, under, and along with the elements. John Calvin articulated the Reformed View which taught that Christ, though not present bodily, is yet present in a mystical communion of believers. Finally, the Reformer Zwingli taught the view that the Lord's Supper was a seal or pledge of what God is doing for the believer in the sacrament. While denying the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, Zwingli maintained that Christ is present in a spiritual manner to the faith of the believer. It is this last view which we have traditionally taught as the proper way to address the issue of the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

A final issue should be addressed before leaving a discussion of this sacrament. The question is often asked as for whom was the Lord's Supper instituted. We believe that the proper participants are those who have faith in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. All Christians who testify to a saving knowledge that their sins are forgiven are encouraged to participate in this sacrament. Who would be taking the sacrament in "an unworthy manner?" We believe that those outside the church are not proper participants. We also believe that children, who are so young that they do not understand the spiritual implications of participating in the Lord's Supper, should be excluded. We believe that any unbelievers, who may possibly be in the service, should be excluded from participation. Finally, any believer with spiritual needs should have those needs attended to prior to participating in the Lord's Supper.

The biblical sanction for the sacrament of Christian baptism is important to note. Jesus Himself was baptized, and His disciples baptized in His name—Matthew 28:18-19. The early Christians designated baptism as the mode of entrance into their fellowship, and they baptized because of the command of Christ—Acts 2:38. Baptism was a way of being identified With Christ, both in His death and resurrection—Galatians 3:25-27. Finally, baptism was probably adult baptism early on, but soon the children of believers were baptized as well—Acts 16:33.

What does Christian baptism signify? We believe that believer's baptism signifies the following: (1) The acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Christ. (2) A pledge with full purpose for further growth in holy life and conduct. (3) Baptism is a sign of spiritual cleansing.

Questions for Discussion

1. Is the observance of Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper optional or a command from Christ?
2. What does the Lord's Supper signify? What does it seal?
3. What does Christian baptism signify?
4. Is participation in these two sacraments necessary for salvation?
5. How would you describe the "presence of Christ" in the Lord's Supper? Is a spiritual presence the best way to describe the presence of Christ?

WHAT WE BELIEVE...ABOUT THE END TIMES

Biblical Background

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:11-15

The two texts chosen to introduce the theme of End Times illustrate the contrast between "words that comfort" and "words that bring warning." We believe that the End Times will be both; a time of comfort and a time of judgment.

Paul wrote to a church that was very concerned that those of their church who had died may perhaps miss the great blessings of the Lord's Second Coming. Paul's word to them was that Christ's return was both for the dead and those who were alive. Both would be reunited with Christ and spend eternity with Him. Paul encouraged the church to comfort one another with those words.

The text from the Book of Revelation is a word of judgment. The reality of the Great White Throne Judgment must be understood by everyone. God is seated on His throne, in kingly splendor, and all stand before Him. Judgment is not based on mere emotion but rather on actual deeds done by each individual. Thus, the books are opened which contain the deeds of each individual. This is a figurative way of stating that God is knowledgeable of everything. Nothing escapes his notice. And the judgment of mankind is based on the evidence of a life lived, either with God in mind, or a life lived as if there is no God!

The determining factor becomes whether or not one's name is written in the Book of

Life, by which is meant whether or not one has put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If someone failed to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior, the end result will be eternal separation from God in the lake of fire.

Explanation of the Concept

We believe that the topic of End Times is a very serious topic and of great importance. While there are many aspects of this great event which we may not understand, there is sufficient information in God's Word to clearly warn of the gravity of this event and to persuade individuals to make certain they are ready for Christ's return.

We believe that human history is to be divided into two segments: this present age and the age to come. This present age, to some extent, is under the influence of Satan and is identified by writers like Paul as "the present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). The present age will extend for an indefinite length of time but will not be forever. The age to come will last for eternity. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ will conclude this present age and usher in the age to come.

We believe that human kind is made up of two components: material and non-material. God created man from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. There are two components, dust of ground and breath of life. The breath of life aspect speaks to the immortal soul that each individual has been endowed with by His Creator. The soul will never die. It will experience eternity either with its Creator or separated from its Creator. For the vast number of people who have lived upon this earth, they have met their Creator through physical death. The death experience is the separation of the soul from the body (2 Corinthians 5:8). The soul is either reunited with its Creator or suffers a separation from its Creator forever.

For many people this is the way their eternal destiny has been established. We believe there will be a generation that will be alive at the time of Christ's Second Coming and will experience the events connected with the Second Advent.

There are two aspects of the Second Advent. The first is that Christ is definitely coming back to earth again. The truth of this fact has been stated by someone as follows: Jesus Christ is coming back again. We don't know when. We must be ready at all times. The second aspect of the Second Advent is a particular order of events that will unfold Christ's return. There are various opinions among Evangelicals concerning the order of events. We believe that a firm belief in the fact of Christ's return is more important than whether or not one can clearly outline the precise order of events of His return.

We believe in the personal, visible, return of Jesus Christ that will establish the age to come and God's eternal kingdom. The fact of the Lord's return is often associated with the idea of a millennial reign of Christ on earth. The millennial reign is a literal, visible, earthly reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years. The Scriptural support for this concept is Revelation 20:4, 6. When the belief in the Lord's return is united with the idea of a millennial reign on earth, three possibilities emerge. First, there is the belief that Jesus Christ will return first and His return will usher in the millennial reign on earth. This is known as Pre-Millennialism.

The second way to connect the Lord's return and a millennial reign is to understand that the church will usher in the thousand year millennial reign and then, Christ will

return. This is known as Post-Millennialism.

The third way to understand these twin concepts is to interpret the millennial reign in a spiritual way. This would lead to an understanding that the reign of Christ is in the heart of the believer. There is no literal reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years. This view is known as Amillennialism. There are Evangelicals identified with all three positions. Historically, the Wesleyan Holiness Movement has been identified with the Pre-Millennial view.

We believe that the age to come will be an eternal existence in one of two realities. One, there is the reality of heaven which will be the eternal abode of the saints of God. This will involve communion with other saints and with our Lord. The other reality is that of an eternal hell which will be the final, eternal end of the impenitent. The Scriptures have more to say about heaven than hell. However, since the subject of heaven is less controversial, it receives less attention in theological writings.

We believe that hell is a literal place of torment.

- Scripture has several ways to describe this positive torment. These include: the second death (Revelation 21:8), outer darkness (Matthew 8:12), the fire of hell (Matthew 13:42), and banishment from God (Genesis 3:24).

For many individuals, their problem with the topic of eternal damnation in a literal hell revolves around two questions. The first question is usually stated in this fashion: Isn't an eternal punishment out of balance in regards to a life-span of seventy years? In other words, shouldn't the punishment fit the crime? An eternal punishment for a short life-span of sixty to seventy years appears to be clearly out of balance. The second question is this: How can a loving God punish mankind forever? This question centers on the attributes of God which include the concepts of love and mercy. The beginning of an answer to these two questions is to see the problem from God's perspective. Sin is a terrible thing—in God's eyes. Sin can not be tolerated by a holy, righteous God. God loves the sinner, but hates his sin. God has done everything possible to save lost mankind. If man refuses to accept God's remedy for sin, there is nothing else for God to do but to punish.

Questions for Discussion

1. Does the understanding of "the present age" and "the age to come" help to prepare one's understanding of the end times?
2. What is the purpose of the Second Advent?
3. How important do you feel it is to emphasize a particular order of events in regards to the Second Advent?
4. What is the point of distinction between Pre-Millennialism, Post-Millennialism, and Amillennialism?
5. Is it important to maintain that the age to come is an eternal reality? Why?
6. How would you respond to someone who rejected the concept of eternal punishment?

GLOSSARY

Age to come. In reference to the doctrine of future things, the understanding that human history is divided into two segments—this current age and the age to come.

Amillennialism. One of the three possible theories concerning the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This particular theory does not interpret Revelation 20:4, 6 as indicating a real, visible, earthly reign of Christ on earth. While believing in the return of Christ, this theory rejects a millennial reign of Christ on earth for one thousand years.

Atheism. The opposite of a belief in the Christian God. While this position might be seen or expressed on a practical, theoretical, or even critical level, all three levels reject the concept of the Christian God.

Atonement. The work of Christ as seen on Calvary. Atonement is first of all, objective, in the sense that Christ accomplished on the cross everything that is needed for the salvation of all mankind. Through His death and resurrection, salvation is possible for all. Atonement is also subjective, in that the merit of the cross must be applied to each individual.

Awakening. That work of the Holy Spirit whereby an individual is made aware of their lost condition and their need of God's forgiveness.

Christology. As part of the Doctrine of the Son, this term refers to the study of the Person of Christ.

Church. Based on the Greek word meaning "the called-out" ones. The Church is the body of Christ, called out from the world and then, in turn, returned to the world as "salt" and "light." The Church is visible, meaning that local congregation that meets to celebrate the goodness of God. The Church is also invisible, meaning the mystical body of Christ from around the world that represents the People of God.

Church Councils. In the face of gathering heresy, the early Church convened Church Councils to affirm the orthodox position and to condemn the heretical views concerning the deity of Christ and the issue of His two natures. The Council at Nicaea (325), at Constantinople (381), and Chalcedon (451), are three important early Councils.

Contingent. Dependent on another for its existence or function.

Continuous Sanctification. The understanding that the Christian never outlives their need of the Holy Spirit and His work in one's life. The most saintly of individuals requires the Holy Spirit to be at work in their life until death.

Conversion. That point in an individual's life where they are aware of their last moment of a life of sin and their first moment of new life in Christ.

Conviction. That work of the Holy Spirit which produces in an individual a sense of guilt and condemnation because of sin. A sense of personal blame for their sin.

Created Holiness. That degree of holiness which Adam had by virtue of being created in God's image. It was

his created state in the Natural and Moral image of God. This holiness consisted of a spontaneous inclination or tendency toward the good.

Crisis Experience. A term that indicates that there are some moments in one's spiritual journey where a change occurs immediately. This is in contrast to those spiritual activities that are the result of growth. We believe that spiritual development is a

combination of both process and crisis experiences.

Crucifixion Terminology. Those biblical terms which relate to the new convert's growth from conversion to entire sanctification. These terms are sometimes related to a "dying to sin" process or a "dying to a sinful nature."

Deism. The belief that God created the world and is transcendent. A view of God that removes the element of the supernatural from the Gospels.

Dichotomy. Mankind is composed of two kinds of essence, a material element and an immaterial element.

Entire Sanctification. That work of the Holy Spirit that produces in the heart of the Christian a cleansing of the heart from all sin, an empowerment for life and service, and a pure devotion to God alone.

Extent of the Atonement. A question as to the design of the plan of salvation. Did God design the plan of atonement for sin to be applicable to all mankind or only to the elect?

First Advent. The coming of Jesus Christ into our world the first time. The birth narratives in Matthew and Luke relate the coming of the Christ Child into our world.

Flesh. As used by St. Paul in Galatians 5:17, that part of man's nature that is against God and works for evil.

Free Will. The belief that an important part of what it means to be a human being is the ability to do an action that is both free and rational. It means that one could always have done otherwise.

Gospel Call. The Holy Spirit as the agent of Christ, makes known His divine purpose for the salvation of the world. This call may be that secret influence exerted upon the consciences of men, apart from the revealed Word, or that call that is made through the Word of God.

Grace. God's unmerited favor to all mankind. Also, enabling power to respond to the work of God, through the Holy Spirit, in one's life.

Incarnation. To make visible. In reference to Jesus Christ, the incarnation was His First Advent. "The Word became flesh..." (St. John 1:14).

Inherited Sin. The belief that all humanity has inherited from Adam a disposition or nature that is inclined to evil continually.

Initial Sanctification. That work of the Holy Spirit at conversion whereby the individual is cleansed from all the corruption that accompanies each act of sin.

Inspiration. That extraordinary agency of the Holy Spirit upon the mind in consequence of which the person who partakes of it is enabled to embrace and communicate the truth of God without error, infirmity, or defect.

Immanent. Indwelling. God's immanence is His presence within the universe.

Christian Maturity. The Christian life from the point of entire sanctification until physical death. This segment of one's life should be the time of the most rapid development in spiritual gifts and graces. It should be the time when Christian service and victorious living are most evident. It will also be the time which the individual is most keenly aware of their dependence on God for day-by-day living.

Millennial Reign. Based on a literal interpretation of Revelation 20:4,6, this theory teaches that Christ will return to this earth some day and will reign on earth with His saints in a real, visible, earthly millennial kingdom. It will last for one thousand years.

Monotheism. The belief that God is one.

Necessary Being. A Being who cannot not exist, whose very essence is existence.
Pantheism. The world view which holds that "all is in God"; God is to the world as a soul is to a body.

Polytheism. The belief in many gods.

Post-Millennial. One of the three millennial views. This particular view teaches that the Church will experience a time of great revival at the end of this present age and then, Christ will return. There will be a time of millennial reign but it will be introduced by a revival in the Church, not Christ's return.

Present Age. Human history is divided into two ages. The current age is referred to as "this present age." It is to be contrasted with "the age that is to come."

Pre-Millennial. A millennial view that teaches Jesus Christ will return to earth and then establish His mil

lennial reign. It will be a real, visible, earthly reign and will last for one thousand years.

Prevenient Grace. Grace that goes before. The belief that individuals, even prior to their conversion, are under the grace of God. This means that God is trying, through a variety of ways, to make Himself known to them and to bring them to a place of salvation. In this sense, sinners are in a "preliminary state of grace." John Wesley taught that this grace was "free to all" and "free in all."

Progressive Sanctification. Refers to that period of time between conversion and entire sanctification. It is usually a time of getting to understand the total problem of sin in one's life. Now it becomes clear that sin is more than "things that I do." The root problem of sin is found in a sinful nature that is contrary to God. This period of time is progressive in that the Holy Spirit is allowing one to see the extent of the problem and at the same time revealing to the new convert His intended cure for a sinful nature. This cure, in Wesleyan terms, is the experience known as entire sanctification.

Propitiation. To appease the wrath of an offended person, or to atone for offenses.

Purity. The crisis experience of entire sanctification has as its first objective to cleanse the heart from all sin. This involves the cleansing of a sinful nature. It is a crisis experience because there will be the last moment of the existence of a sinful nature and the first moment of a heart cleansed. This experience of heart purity is contrasted with Christian maturity which is the life of a Christian lived under the Holy Spirit's control.

Reconciliation. A change from one state to another; a change from a state of enmity to one of reconciliation and fellowship.

Redemption. To put back, with specific reference to the redemptive price that was paid.

Repentance. Signifies contrition and a sorrowful change of mind. A sorrow that leads to the forsaking and turning away from sin.

Revelation. Every manifestation of God to the consciousness of man, whether through nature and the course of human history, or through the higher disclosures of the Incarnate Word and the Holy Spirit.

Sacrament. In the words of St. Augustine, "a sacrament is the Word made visible." The Protestant Church usually observes two sacraments: The Lord's Supper and Christian baptism. These two sacraments are further defined as first a sign, by which the outward and visible signs of each sacrament signify real inward and spiritual grace. Secondly, sacraments are seals, in that spiritual work is sealed and God's

seal of approval is placed on an individual.

Sanctification. Everything God, through the Holy Spirit, does in the life of the new convert. Thus, sanctification is the spiritual process of the Holy Spirit being at work in an individual's life beginning at conversion and extending to the last day of one's physical life.

Saving Faith. Faith considered as the condition and instrument of salvation. Saving faith is a personal trust in the Person of the Savior.

Second Advent. The belief in the personal return of Jesus Christ to this world. This return will bring to a

conclusion "this present age" and usher in "the age to come."

Secondness Theology. The belief that something remains in the heart of the new convert that is displeasing to God. This "something" is defined as a sinful nature or disposition that is contrary to God. Evangelicals suggest a number of ways to counteract the manifestations of this sinful nature. It is the Wesleyan teaching that holds out the possibility of this sinful nature being cleansed by the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion.

Sin. Various terms are used in Scripture to define the concept of sin. Basically, it is a "falling away from, a missing of the right way, or a missing of the mark." Sin is also the absence of righteousness and a lack of conformity to law. It is further defined as ungodliness. It is characterized by the absence of God.

Spiritual Death. One of the results of Adam's transgression in the Garden. Adam lost the Moral Image of God from his life. He lost the created holiness which was his by being created in God's image. This loss was immediate and Adam knew he had lost something. Thus, he hid from God and tried to cover up his loss.

Substitutionary Atonement. The belief that Christ's death on Calvary was a substitutionary death. He died on behalf of a sinful world. He died in our place and paid our penalty.

Theism. The world view that affirms the existence of a personal, infinite Creator of the world, who is immanent in the world, unlimited in power and love.

Transcendent. That which is more than our experience or goes beyond the world. God is transcendent because He is outside of or beyond nature.

Trinity. The Christian belief that within the One Godhead, there are three personal manifestations: God the Father, God the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit.

Verbal-Plenary. The biblical view of the inspiration of the Bible in which every word (verbal) is the inspired Word of God. This Word gives full (plenary) expression to what God wanted us to know for faith and practice.

Vicarious. That which is done "on behalf of" or "in place of" another. The sufferings of Christ, dying for the sins of lost humanity, were vicarious. The innocent died for the guilty.