

FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS

of the United Church of God, *an International Association*

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Note: This booklet first lists each fundamental belief from the Constitution of the United Church of God, *an International Association*, then explains and expands on each of those beliefs. Additional literature on many of these topics is available free of charge by contacting the United Church of God at the addresses or phone numbers listed at the end of this booklet.

God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

We believe in one God, the Father, eternally existing, who is a Spirit, a personal Being of supreme intelligence, knowledge, love, justice, power and authority. He, through Jesus Christ, is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. He is the Source of life and the One for whom human life exists. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who is the Word and who has eternally existed. We believe that He is the Messiah, the Christ, the divine Son of the living God, conceived of the Holy Spirit, born in human flesh of the virgin Mary. We believe that it is by Him that God created all things, and that without Him was not anything made that was made. We believe in the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God and of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the power of God and the Spirit of life eternal (2 Timothy 1:7; Ephesians 4:6; 1 Corinthians 8:6; John 1:1-4; Colossians 1:16).

We believe that God is the Sovereign of the universe, existing supremely above all else. God is spirit (John 4:24), existing in a different realm from that of humans, who are flesh. Our understanding and perception of God, therefore, are based on God's revelation to us through His written Word, the Bible.

The Bible reveals God as the "Father" and Jesus Christ as His

"Son." The distinction between the two is implicit from the very beginning of God's revelation (Genesis 1:1), where the Hebrew word *Elohim* is used (*Elohim* is the plural form of the Hebrew word for God, *Eloah*). There has been communication between these two from the beginning, as seen in the example of Genesis 1:26, where the pronouns *us* and *our* refer to *Elohim*.

The Old Testament focuses on the God of Israel, who identifies Himself as "I AM" and "the LORD God . . . of Abraham, . . . of Isaac, and . . . of Jacob" (Exodus 3:14-15), (the word *LORD* being derived from the Hebrew *YHWH*). In John 8:58, Christ refers to Himself as "I am." This is the same God who delivered the Israelites out of Egypt and accompanied them in the wilderness and who was later known in the New Testament as Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). Both the Old Testament and New Testament contain references to more than one personage in the Godhead (Psalm 110:1, for example, which is quoted in Acts 2:29-36). The New Testament identifies Them as God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son (1 Corinthians 8:6). The Son is also called God (Hebrews 1:8-9).

Jesus Christ is called the "Word," who "was *with* God" in the beginning and is also identified *as* "God" (John 1:1-2). He created all things (verses 3, 10), and later became flesh and dwelled with humans (John 1:14). He is also called "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). Humans have the wonderful potential and opportunity to enter the family of God (Romans 8:14, 19; John 1:12; 1 John 3:1-2).

The relationship between the Word and the Father is more clearly defined in the New Testament, when "the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14, King James Version; Philippians 2:5-11), revealed the Father to His disciples (Matthew 11:25-27), was sacrificed for the forgiveness of our sins and has now once again been exalted by the Father (John 17:5).

The New Testament emphasizes the unity between the "Father" and "Son," yet makes the distinction between the two clear in numerous scriptures (e.g., John 20:17; Romans 15:6). We read in Ephesians that God "created all things through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:9; Hebrews 1:1-3). The relationship between the Father and the Son demonstrates God's perfect and eternal way of life. The Father has always loved the Son, and the Son has always loved the Father (John 17:4, 20-26). The harmony between the Father and the Son is a single-

ness of mind and purpose, which Jesus Christ asked the Father to bring about among His disciples, Himself, and the Father (verses 20-23).

“God,” as used in the Bible, can be a reference to either the Father (e.g., Acts 13:33; Galatians 4:6), Jesus Christ the Son (e.g., Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1, 14) or both (e.g., Romans 8:9), depending on the context of the scriptures. The power and mind that proceed from God are called the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:2; Luke 1:35; Acts 1:8; 10:38; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 2 Timothy 1:7). The Holy Spirit of God is not identified as a third person in a trinity, but is consistently described as the power of God. The Holy Spirit is given to mankind upon repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38) to serve as an earnest payment on eternal life (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:14 [both KJV]).

God wants us to know Him so we can have confidence in Him and love Him. He has disclosed much more about Himself through the names that He revealed to those with whom He worked through the ages. These names reveal that God possesses supreme intelligence, power, glory and wisdom; that He embodies all righteousness, perfection and truth; that He possesses heaven and earth; that He is immortal and worthy of all praise. God is our provider, healer, shield, defense, counselor, teacher, lawgiver, judge, strength and salvation. He is faithful, merciful, generous, patient, kind, just and compassionate. God hears our prayers, makes a covenant with us, is a refuge in trouble, gives us knowledge and desires to give us immortality that we might share eternal life with Him.

The Word of God

We believe that Scripture, both the Old and New Testament, is God's revelation and His complete expressed will to humanity. Scripture is inspired in thought and word, infallible in the original writings; is the supreme and final authority in faith and in life; and is the foundation of all truth (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21; John 10:35; 17:17).

The Old and New Testament are unified in revealing God's plan of salvation and the working out of that plan in human history. The entire Bible reveals the acts of God's merciful intervention to save mankind for eternal life in His family. In writing the various books of the Bible, the authors' own personality, style and vocabulary were reflected in what they wrote. When writing, they did so as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). Thus God influenced and directed the minds of His servants, yet allowed them free expression as they wrote the books known as the Word of God.

The Holy Scriptures are the only foundation of knowledge and truth that Jesus and the apostles used as a basic text for teaching God's way to salvation. First and foremost, Jesus Christ set the example of following the Scriptures as the ultimate authoritative text in a Christian's life. In successfully combating temptation from Satan, Christ stated, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4, emphasis added throughout; Luke 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3). Christ quoted other scriptures during His battle against the ultimate enemy, the devil (Matthew 4:7, 10).

Christ then began His earthly ministry by reading the Scriptures and declaring, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:16-21). In John 10:35, Christ proclaimed that “the Scripture cannot be broken.” He referenced Scripture as an active, authoritative source in His life (John 7:38, 42). Nothing distracted Christ from His focus on the Scriptures—neither betrayal, nor being crucified (John 13:18; 17:12; 19:28; Matthew 27:46; Psalm 22:1; Luke 23:46; Psalm 31:5).

The apostles followed the example of Christ. The core of Christian faith, doctrine and behavior continued to be defined through the Scriptures. The resurrected Jesus Christ resumed His personal instruction to His disciples as He “opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (Luke 24:32, 44-45). It was through the Scriptures that disciples were made of all nations, as in the example of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-35).

Paul, the apostle to the nations, appealed to the authority of the Scriptures by asking questions, such as “What does the Scripture say?” (Romans 4:3; 11:2; Galatians 4:30). At other times, Paul confirmed his position by declaring, “For the Scripture says . . . ,” or similar statements (Romans 10:11; Galatians 3:8, 22; 1 Timothy 5:18). Clearly the Old Testament and New Testament were written both for Jewish and gentile Christians.

There is a continuity between the Old and New Testaments (Matthew 4:4; 2 Timothy 3:15-16). The New builds on and amplifies the Old Testament (Matthew 5-7). History shows that the only Scriptures that existed during the ministry of Christ and the early decades of the apostles were the Old Testament Scriptures.

Reading, hearing and doing God’s Word are key characteristics of God’s people (Luke 8:21; 11:28). The Word of God builds faith in a person’s life (Romans 10:17; Colossians 3:16). God expects His people to diligently study His Word regularly for understanding, for personal edification and for guarding themselves in an ungodly society (Acts 17:11; Ephesians 6:17; 1 John 2:14; Psalm 119:9). Internalizing God’s Word enables one to defend his faith (1 Peter 3:15). The Holy Scriptures are able to make us “wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15).

The Bible is alive with timeless application in our daily life (Hebrews 4:12). Paul, while imprisoned, reminded Timothy that, though man can

be restrained, the Word of God cannot (2 Timothy 2:8-9).

The Church of God maintains the biblical mandate to rely upon God’s Word in its quest for the truth. As stated in 2 Timothy 3:16, God’s inspired Word establishes doctrine, refutes error, administers correction and gives instruction. The truth of the Bible not only teaches and guides His people, but it also sanctifies or sets apart His Church (John 17:17). The Bible serves as an essential tool in God’s relationship with His Church, “that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of the water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26).

Satan the Devil

We believe that Satan is a spirit being who is the adversary of God and the children of God; Satan has been given dominion over the world for a specific time; Satan has deceived humanity into rejecting God and His law; Satan has ruled by deception with the aid of a host of demons who are rebellious angels, spirit beings who followed Satan in his rebellion (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 8:12; 2 Timothy 2:26; John 12:31; 16:11; Revelation 12:4, 9; 20:1-3, 7, 10; Leviticus 16:21-22; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 11:14; Ephesians 2:2).

Satan is the adversary of God, as evidenced even in the meaning of his name in both Hebrew and Greek. He opposes God continually at every opportunity. He despises God’s plan, particularly that God is working with human beings to add them to His family. Hence, he also detests human beings. He is the deceiver and accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:9-10). He is a murderer and a liar and the father of lying (John 8:44). He is described as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

Satan is not an ordinary opponent. He is an extremely resourceful and cunning adversary whose ultimate goal is to deny salvation to mankind by deceiving them, leading them astray, enticing them to sin and turning them against God (Ephesians 6:11-18; 2 Corinthians 2:11; Luke 8:12).

Satan must act within the limits permitted by God (Job 1:12; 2:6). Job's account also illustrates Satan's accusatory attitude and clearly describes him as a specific personality and literal being. He came to Jesus Christ as a literal being in an effort to tempt Him (Matthew 4:1-11). His reign as the god of this world will come to an end at the seventh and last trumpet when Christ returns (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 11:15), although he will be released for one final, short time at the end of the Millennium (Revelation 20:3).

Just as Satan's actions are limited by God's will, his time is also limited. He is presently the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4; John 12:31). He will be removed and bound throughout the millennial reign of the Messiah, then released for a short while at the end of the 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-3, 7-8). Satan will not cease to exist, but will be "rendered powerless" by the Messiah (Hebrews 2:14, New American Standard Bible). The word translated "destroy" in this verse most often means "to render idle" or "inoperative."

Satan was created as an angel of high position and authority (Ezekiel 28:14, 16). In Isaiah 14:12 he is called Lucifer, which other versions translate as "star of the morning," "bright star" or "morning star" (New American Standard Bible, Revised English Bible, New International Version). He was called an "anointed cherub" and is represented as evidently having at least equal rank with Michael, an archangel (Jude 9). He was created perfect and blameless, but eventually chose the way of sin and rebellion (Ezekiel 28:12, 15, 17). A third of the angels followed him in his insurrection, as witnessed by Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:4; Luke 10:18). He and the angels who rebelled with him (demons) attempted to overthrow God and were defeated and cast down (Isaiah 14:12-15; 2 Peter 2:4). The kingdom of Satan is now characterized by darkness, not light (Luke 22:53; Ephesians 6:12; Colossians 1:13).

Under some circumstances, the devil and his demons are able

to gain possession and control of human beings and even animals (Matthew 8:28-33; 9:32-34). Satan himself entered and possessed the traitor Judas (Luke 22:3). Christ, whose authority is greater than Satan's, cast out demons during His ministry on earth and has empowered others to do the same (Mark 16:17).

Satan is referred to by different names and descriptions which denote some of his evil roles, characteristics and actions. Some of these are the devil, Apollyon, Abaddon, Belial, Beelzebub, the great dragon and the prince of the power of the air.

Humanity

We believe that humanity was created in the image of God with the potential to become children of God, partakers of the divine nature. God formed humanity of flesh, which is material substance. Human beings live by the breath of life, are mortal, subject to corruption and decay, without eternal life, except as the gift of God under God's terms and conditions as expressed in the Bible. We believe that God placed before Adam and Eve the choice of eternal life through obedience to God or death through sin. Adam and Eve yielded to temptation and disobeyed God. As a result, sin entered the world, and, through sin, death. Death now reigns over all humanity because all have sinned (Genesis 1:26; 2 Peter 1:4; Hebrews 9:27; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 5:12; 6:23).

The first chapter of the Holy Bible reveals that God created men and women in His image (Genesis 1:26-27). Humanity was created with a truly amazing potential. The future of humanity is to be children in the family of God (1 John 3:1-2; 2 Peter 1:4; 2 Corinthians 6:18).

The character of Almighty God is perfect. He is inherently good and

cannot sin. Even God, who is all-powerful, does not create perfect character in humans by simply willing that result. The development of character requires a conscious decision by a free moral agent to take the responsibility to conduct his or her life based on a knowledge of what is morally right and what is morally wrong. It also requires a decision to choose what is right and to reject what is wrong.

When they were first created, our first parents, Adam and Eve, received a life of limited duration, a physical existence. “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). The Hebrew word *nephesh*, translated “being” in Genesis 2:7, is used in the first chapter of Genesis four times in connection with animals (Genesis 1:20, 21, 24, 30) and is translated as “body” in the phrase “dead body” in Numbers 6:6. The first man was later told, “In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19).

The biblical book of wisdom known as Ecclesiastes contains this exhortation: “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Human beings are mortal, subject to corruption and decay. Human beings do not possess immortality in the form of a “soul.” They are without eternal life. A biblical prayer declares: “What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your truth?” (Psalm 30:9).

God desires to give to every human being the gift of eternal life as a member of His family. Eternal life is not something that anyone can earn. However, God will not grant this precious gift to anyone who does not yield to Him and His law (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). In the Bible, eternal life in the family of God is called *salvation*. God reveals to us, through the divinely inspired Scriptures, that salvation is not automatically granted to every human being. He will bestow this blessing only on those who have proven their willingness to obey Him (Revelation 21:7-8).

God is not obligated to preserve us forever as His children, enjoying life in the spirit realm, but we know that God is love (1 John 4:8). Therefore, out of unselfish, outgoing concern for us, He has devised a plan whereby human beings can be given salvation, the greatest possible blessing that a loving Creator can bestow (Luke 12:32).

When God created the first human beings, Adam and Eve, He gave them access to the tree of life, symbolic of eternal life (Genesis 2:9; 3:22). He told them not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was symbolic of the human choice, apart from God, to determine what is right and wrong. He instructed them not to defy His revealed instructions and, by so doing, to sin (Genesis 2:9, 16-17). Sin leads to death (verse 17; Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Romans 6:23). Every sin damages the character of the one who commits it. To commit sin harms both the individual sinner and society in general.

Adam and Eve were free moral agents who, under the influence of Satan, violated God’s explicit command (Genesis 3:1-6). The first humans thus began to live in a manner contrary to the will of their loving Creator, placing themselves under the penalty of death, about which God had warned them in advance. No human being except Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has lived a sinless life (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Hebrews 4:15). In spite of human sinfulness, God’s ultimate plan for humankind has not been thwarted. In His omniscient wisdom, God provided a means by which human beings can be reconciled to Him (John 3:16-17). Human beings can still develop the godly character that is a prerequisite to receiving God’s most precious gift of eternal life as His children (1 Corinthians 15:22; Galatians 2:20). Apart from the deliverance that God has provided, death reigns over all humanity because all have sinned (Romans 3:23).

Sin and God’s Law

We believe that sin is the transgression of the law. The law is spiritual, perfect, holy, just and good. The law defines God’s love and is based upon the two great principles of love toward God and love toward neighbor. It is immutable and binding. The Ten Commandments are the 10 points of God’s law of love. We believe

that breaking any one point of the law brings upon a person the penalty of sin. We believe that this fundamental spiritual law reveals the only way to true life and the only possible way of happiness, peace and joy. All unhappiness, misery, anguish and woe have come from transgressing God's law (1 John 3:4; 5:3; Matthew 5:17-19; 19:17-19; 22:37-40; James 2:10-11; Romans 2:5-9; 7:12-14; 13:8-10).

We believe God created humankind to ultimately become members of His family, destined to inherit immortality and live in a harmonious relationship with Him and each other for eternity (Hebrews 2:6-13). To share eternity with God, we must also share His thoughts, agree with His approach, embrace His way of life and appreciate and uphold His values as expressed by His law (Philippians 2:5-13). God's written revelation to mankind, the Holy Scriptures, reveals this essential knowledge to us through His laws and teachings (2 Timothy 3:15-17). This forms the foundation and basis for the everlasting relationship God desires to have with us. Therefore it is imperative that anyone who seeks this ultimate relationship with God heed the directives of God's law as revealed in His Word.

Sin, the transgression of the law, was introduced to humanity in the Garden of Eden. Satan lied to Adam and Eve concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:4; John 8:44). Contrary to Satan's deceptive prediction, Adam and Eve did die. As their descendants, we all share the common condition of mortality (Hebrews 9:27). It's no coincidence that sin's universal presence in all humans (Romans 3:23) is connected to death and the withholding of God's gift, eternal life (Romans 6:23).

The pervasive nature of sin and death is demonstrated by the human tendency to disregard and disobey God's law (Romans 8:7). Self-deception frequently accompanies this departure from God's perfect guidelines (Jeremiah 17:9; 10:23). The influence of Satan is unmistakable in this pattern, both directly (Ephesians 2:1-3) and indirectly through those he deceives (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Having become the adversary of God through his own rebellion, Satan has covertly enlisted the human race in his battle, since all sin,

in addition to its effect on humans, is by definition against God (Genesis 39:9; Psalm 51:4).

Violating any of God's instructions is sin (1 John 5:17), but it is also sinful to omit doing what one should do (James 4:17) or to violate one's conscience (Romans 14:23). Furthermore, sin is an enslaving power from which we need redemption and release (Romans 7:23-25). We are powerless to bring about this redemption on our own (1 Peter 1:18-19). Since sin in any form brings about alienation from God (Isaiah 59:1-3; Ephesians 4:17-19) and eventual death, no amount of obedience following such conduct can reverse its effect, even though obedience is expected. Only the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ can procure our release (Hebrews 2:14-15) and reconcile us to God.

Through forgiveness of sin, available by God's grace (Romans 3:24), a Christian finds freedom in obeying God's law (James 1:21-25). Rather than being enslaved to sin by disobedience, we serve God by obedience and walk the path God intends, to be led to eternal life in His kingdom by His generous and undeserved gift (Romans 6:16-23).

To return to a former life of sin is a serious matter in the sight of God (2 Peter 2:20-22). However, the only sin that cannot be forgiven is the willful rejection of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, by which forgiveness of sin is made possible (Hebrews 6:4-6). This sin is described by Christ as "blasphemy against the Spirit" (Matthew 12:31), a knowing rejection of the power and authority of God. After every human being has had a full opportunity for salvation, those still unrepentant will be destroyed (Revelation 20:14-15), thus fulfilling the ultimate penalty of sin, the second death.

Although every person is responsible for his own sin (Ezekiel 18:4, 20), Satan the devil is identified as the deceiver of mankind and the one ultimately responsible for leading humanity into sin (Revelation 12:9; 20:1-3).

The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ

We believe God so loved the world of helpless sinners that He gave His only begotten Son, who, though in all points tempted as we are, lived without sin in the human flesh. That Son, Jesus Christ, died as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. His life, because He is the creator of all humanity, is of greater value than the sum total of all human life. His death is, therefore, sufficient to pay the penalty for every human being's sins. In paying this penalty He has made it possible, according to God's plan for each person and for humanity as a whole, to have their sins forgiven and to be released from the death penalty (Hebrews 4:15; 9:15; 10:12; John 1:18; 3:16; Colossians 1:16-17, 22; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; Ephesians 1:11; Revelation 13:8).

Jesus Christ is the focal point of Christianity. Forgiveness of sin and ultimately the gift of eternal life are available only through His sacrifice. We are reconciled by His death but saved by His life (Romans 5:10). The Scriptures describe Jesus Christ by using several titles, including: the Word (John 1:1), our Savior (1 John 4:14), our High Priest (Hebrews 9:11), our Lord (Revelation 22:21), the Son of God (Revelation 2:18; 1 John 5:5), our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7), the Son of Man (Revelation 14:14), and King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:16).

Christ is our Savior and the ultimate sacrifice for sin. Even though He was divine, Jesus became a human being to die for the sins of

mankind (Philippians 2:5-7). He was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death (Hebrews 2:9). As the Son of Man, He was able to experience the trials of human life (Hebrews 4:15) to better empathize with us as our merciful High Priest (Hebrews 2:17). Christ as our Savior gave His life that we might live. He died a hideous death, as our Passover, that we might understand the magnitude of sin and the monumental significance of His sacrifice, which was made for every human being.

Jesus lived a perfect life and therefore did not deserve the death penalty. However, He was preordained from the foundation of the world to die (Revelation 13:8). Even though Christ, as the perfect sacrifice for sin, was accused of violating God's law on more than one occasion, He never broke God's law. We accept His sacrifice as essential to our salvation. As we model our lives after Jesus Christ, we "take up our cross" and follow Him (Luke 14:27), which includes a willingness to suffer and be persecuted as He set the example (1 Peter 2:19-23). We thank God the Father for giving up His Son Jesus Christ to be that perfect sacrifice for all mankind (John 3:16).

All sin is forgiven upon repentance and the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice. Forgiveness of sin requires the supreme sacrifice—the death of Jesus Christ. His crucifixion more than 1,900 years ago was essential to God's plan of redemption and salvation.

By understanding this fundamental belief we can be assured that our sins are blotted out. We can go forward in our Christian lives with confidence, knowing that through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ we can be reconciled to the Father. As a result of this reconciliation, we can develop a relationship with our Father that provides hope and assurance for our future. We can look forward to eternal life in the Kingdom of God as a gift of God's grace because of the sacrifice that Christ willingly gave for every one of us.

Three Days and Three Nights

We believe that the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead after His body lay three days and three nights in the grave, thus making immortality possible for mortal man. He thereafter ascended into heaven, where He now sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate (1 Peter 1:17-21; 3:22; Matthew 12:40; 1 Corinthians 15:53; 2 Timothy 1:10; John 20:17; Hebrews 8:1; 12:2).

One of the most dramatic, encouraging and gracious events of all time was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. God the Father resurrected His only Son, Jesus the Christ, who had been killed and placed in the tomb just outside Jerusalem. His death, allowed by the Father and willingly submitted to by Jesus (John 10:17-18), paid the penalty for all sins of all human beings who will have ever lived, on the condition that they truly repent of those sins. His death was preordained by the Father and the Word from the foundation of the world as a necessary part of the salvation of mankind (1 Peter 1:20).

God, in His sovereign justice, mercy and love, thus made it possible for all humans to have their sins forgiven (upon repentance and faith) and to be reconciled to Him by the blood of Christ as the Lamb of God (Matthew 26:28; Revelation 12:11). But the death of Jesus Christ was not the end of the matter. We are reconciled to God by Jesus' death, but we are saved by His life (Romans 5:10).

Only through Christ's resurrection to immortality could we have a living Savior who, as High Priest, intercedes for us with the Father (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 4:15-16; Romans 8:26-27). Only because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead do human beings have any reason to believe in the gospel of the Kingdom of God or to believe that they can be saved from eternal death (1 Corinthians 15:14-19). His resurrection provides for humans a basis for living hope that they, too, may inherit eternal life (1 Peter 1:3).

Jesus offered both the fact and the details of His resurrection as the only divine sign to His generation that he was "greater than Jonah" and "greater than Solomon" and that His message should lead its hearers to repentance (Matthew 12:39-42). He said that He would be three days and three nights—a period of 72 hours (John 11:9-10; Genesis 1:5)—in the heart of the earth (the grave), just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish (Jonah 1:17). Elsewhere, He said that He would "be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31).

The problem with the commonly accepted belief regarding the crucifixion and resurrection is that there are not three days and three nights between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning. We believe the weight of scriptural and historical evidence leads to the conclusion that Jesus died on Wednesday afternoon, was hurriedly placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea shortly before sunset that same afternoon (the eve of an annual Sabbath, the first day of Unleavened Bread; John 19:30-31, 42; Mark 15:42-46) and was resurrected by the Father shortly before sunset on Saturday, three days and three nights after being placed in the tomb, exactly as He had said.

This explanation is consistent with the details found in Scripture. It does not require a strained fitting of three days and three nights between Friday evening and Sunday by speculating about parts of days and nights. It reconciles the accounts of the women and the spices, found in Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:56. In the first account, the faithful women obediently rested during holy time and afterward procured the spices. In the second account, the women prepared the spices and afterward rested during holy time.

These accounts are reconciled by understanding that there were two periods of holy time during the week in question. Jesus was crucified on the Passover (Matthew 26:18-20; 1 Corinthians 5:7), which was the

preparation day (Mark 15:42) for the first annual Holy Day on the Jewish calendar, the first day of Unleavened Bread. The women waited until this day was over, then bought and prepared the spices, then rested again on God's weekly Sabbath day, and then proceeded to the tomb to apply the spices to Jesus' body early on Sunday morning.

They visited the tomb after the holy Sabbaths (plural) of that week (as the original Greek of Matthew 28:1 should be translated). The annual Sabbath (annual Holy Days also are called "Sabbaths" [Leviticus 16:31; 23:24]) was Thursday, and the weekly Sabbath was Saturday. When they arrived at the tomb early Sunday morning, they found it empty and heard the announcement from the angel that Jesus was alive and was not there (Mark 16:6).

A significant amount of historical and scriptural evidence points to A.D. 31 as the year of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Among these indicators of an A.D. 31 crucifixion are the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy of the coming of the Messiah (Daniel 9:24-26; Ezra 7 [Artaxerxes' decree]), and a careful consideration of three milestones: the likely date of Jesus' birth, His age when He began His ministry and the duration of His ministry.

The calculated calendar of the Jews places the Passover in A.D. 31 on Wednesday, and Jesus Christ's death on that day fulfilled His role as the true Passover Lamb of God (1 Corinthians 5:7). The next day, Thursday, was a holy (annual) Sabbath. On that Thursday, the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate to secure permission to seal and guard Jesus' tomb (Matthew 27:62-66). Later, on Sunday, the resurrected Jesus walked along the road to Emmaus and talked with two of His disciples, who discussed all the things that had happened, including the Thursday visit by the leaders to Pilate (Luke 24:13-14, 20). They mentioned that this day, Sunday, was the third day since all these things had happened (verse 21).

In summary, we believe that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, died for our sins on the Passover, was entombed for three days and three nights (72 hours) and then was resurrected and, after a period of further contact with the disciples, ascended to heaven to sit at the Father's right hand, far above all others in power, glory and honor (Ephesians 1:19-23).

Repentance

We believe that all who truly repent of their sins in full surrender and willing obedience to God, and who by faith accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, have their sins forgiven by an act of divine grace. Such individuals are justified, pardoned from the penalty of sin and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, which literally abides within them and supplies the divine love that alone can fulfill the law and produce righteousness. They are baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ, which is the true Church of God. We believe in a true change in life and attitude. Only those who have the indwelling presence of, and are being led by, the Holy Spirit are Christ's (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:29-32; 2 Corinthians 7:10; John 3:16; Ephesians 1:7; 2:7-9; Romans 3:21-26; 5:5; 6:6; 8:4, 9-10, 14; 13:1; Jeremiah 33:8; John 14:16-17; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Philippians 2:3-5).

Repentance from dead works is listed in Hebrews 6:1 as a part of the foundation that ultimately leads to perfection and eternal life. Jesus pointed out the importance of repentance when He twice stated that "unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5). God requires that everyone repent (Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9).

In the first recorded sermon in the New Testament Church, Peter told the people to "repent" (Acts 2:38). Repentance goes beyond being sorry or showing remorse for one's past actions (2 Corinthians 7:8-11). True repentance involves a recognition of our nature and its opposition to God (Romans 8:7). It requires a change, a complete and thorough turnaround in one's life, a change from going the way of the world to going the way of God (Isaiah 55:7-8; Acts 26:20). It is full surrender and willing

obedience, based on the knowledge of how God wants us to live.

Repentance begins with our crying out to God for forgiveness of our sins and our accepting Jesus Christ as personal Savior. It is not a decision based on emotion only, though emotion is certainly an important part (Acts 2:37), but a decision to sincerely obey God through faith in Jesus Christ. Christ's righteousness becomes ours through faith in Him (Philippians 3:8-9; Romans 8:1-4). Repentance is not simply compliance with a system of religion or a set of rules. Confidence in God and His ways will lead one to act in accordance with His will and to manifest works of righteousness (James 2:17-26). True godly repentance is not something that a person can work up by himself. It is a gift from God (2 Timothy 2:25). It is one of the many good things our heavenly Father gives us (James 1:17). He leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Repentance is a major part of the conversion process. As Peter continued in that first sermon: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). We are to repent of sin, which is the transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). Repentance precedes baptism.

After repentance and baptism, God's Spirit is given to a person through the laying on of hands (2 Timothy 1:6). The Holy Spirit now leads us to live God's way (Romans 8:14). We now have the love of God motivating us to keep God's laws (1 John 5:3). True Christians have the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9) and strive to live as Christ lived (1 John 2:6).

Repentance involves both sorrow and joy. Repentance leads to a joyful and eternal relationship with our loving God, our Creator and giver of life. Repentance focuses our vision on the love and mercy of God and the forgiveness of sin made possible by the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Repentance is necessary for putting off the "old man" and becoming a part of the family of God (Ephesians 4:20-24). Jesus said, "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). The expectation of being a part of the Kingdom of God is certainly reason to rejoice!

Soon after godly repentance, one should be baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37-38), thereby blotting out all past sins (Romans 3:25). Afterward comes a life led by God's Spirit, growing in grace and knowledge, bearing fruit and being perfected in holiness and

righteousness (2 Peter 3:18; Matthew 13:23; 2 Corinthians 7:1).

Repentance must be ongoing, however. It is not a one-time action in the life of the believer. A converted person must continue to battle sin in his or her life (1 John 1:8-10; 2:1). His human nature remains for the rest of his life and wars against his mind, leading to sin (Romans 7:17, 20-21). One desires to please and obey God. The love of God in that person (Romans 5:5) acknowledges the perfect way of God and wants to follow that way, but also realizes the weakness of the flesh (Romans 7:12-25).

God does not condemn the believer (Romans 8:1) as long as he remains in a repentant attitude of overcoming sin (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). The converted person continues through repentance and faith to rely on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to cover his sins in this lifelong process of overcoming.

Water Baptism

We believe in the ordinance of water baptism by immersion after repentance. Through the laying on of hands, with prayer, the believer receives the Holy Spirit and becomes a part of the spiritual Body of Jesus Christ (Matthew 3:13, 16; John 3:23; Acts 2:38; 8:14-17; 19:5-6; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

John the Baptist introduced a baptism of repentance, tied to the concept of forgiveness of sins (Matthew 3:1-6; Mark 1:4-5). Jesus Himself was baptized by John (Matthew 3:13-17), not because He needed to repent or be forgiven, but as an example for His disciples throughout all ages.

The word *baptize* is simply an anglicized version of the Greek word

baptizo, which means “to immerse.” By definition, then, the only biblical form of baptism is a complete immersion in water. John the Baptist chose a particular location in the Jordan River for his baptizing because sufficient water was available there (John 3:23).

For the Christian, the ordinance of baptism is immensely important. In one action, Christ’s death, burial and resurrection are called to mind for the believer and linked to his or her own symbolic “death” and “resurrection” from the “watery grave” to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-6; Colossians 2:12-13). Also inherent in the symbolism is the promise of the believer’s future resurrection into the Kingdom of God. The forgiven sinner emerges from the waters of baptism to live a new life in Christ, free from the death penalty incurred by sin. The waters of baptism have symbolically washed away those sins. In this regard, baptism is an outward acknowledgment of the believer’s inward intent to yield and submit his or her life to God and His way (Ephesians 4:20-24).

Baptism, which is commanded, must be preceded by faith and repentance (Acts 2:37-38; Mark 16:16). The very symbolism of baptism itself shows a willingness to “bury” the old sinful life (Romans 6:11). Our acknowledgment of guilt and the need for Jesus Christ to save us from the consequences of sin is of paramount importance. This repentance is characterized by a change of heart and action and is based on personal faith in, and a total commitment to, Jesus Christ and God the Father (Luke 14:25-33; Colossians 2:12). Baptism should be entered into only by someone who is mature enough to fully grasp and appreciate the lifelong commitment required. The Bible gives no indication that baptism is appropriate for children.

Baptism is followed by prayer and laying on of hands. This is a part of the process by which we receive the gift of God’s Spirit (Acts 8:14-18). It is through the Holy Spirit that Christ lives in the Christian (John 14:16-17, 23; Galatians 2:20). Through this process, the believer is placed into the spiritual Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), bringing rejoicing in heaven (Luke 15:7).

The commission Jesus Christ gave His disciples includes the authority to baptize believers (Matthew 28:18-20). So those who have come to repentance through the calling of God (John 6:44) seek baptism for the forgiveness of sins, following the example and instruction of Jesus Christ.

The Sabbath Day

We believe that the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath of the Lord our God. On this day we are commanded to rest from our labors and worship God, following the teachings and example of Jesus, the apostles and the New Testament Church (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-11; 31:13-17; Leviticus 23:3; Isaiah 58:13; Hebrews 4:4-10; Mark 1:21; 2:27-28; 6:2; Acts 13:42-44; 17:2; 18:4; Luke 4:31).

The Sabbath day was made and set apart for man from the time of creation. God blessed and sanctified the seventh day, and in it He rested from all His works. The Sabbath was the day after the creation of the first human, an ordained time for man to focus on a close personal relationship with his Maker (Genesis 2:2-3).

The Sabbath was made and set apart for man from creation and directly benefits us. Jesus Christ is Lord of the Sabbath, thereby forever linking the Creator Himself with this holy time (Mark 2:27-28). It is a very special time to deepen and broaden man’s devotion to and relationship with God. When we turn from seeking our own way, we find pleasure in that which pleases God (Isaiah 58:13-14).

God gave instructions concerning the observance of the Sabbath in Exodus 20:8-10. Man is to “*remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*” Man remembers and hallows the Sabbath by worshiping and resting on the seventh day. As Christians follow this pattern, they are following the example of their Creator and are reminded of the one who brought them into being.

In Deuteronomy 5:12-15 God reemphasizes the need to keep the Sabbath. He explains that the Sabbath is to be a reminder not only of

the Creator, but that He is the One who frees from bondage (see also Luke 4:18-19). Ancient Israel remembered being freed from physical bondage in Egypt. Christians remember being freed from spiritual bondage and liberated through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:16-18).

Exodus 31:13-17 points out that the Sabbath is a sign between God and His people and constitutes a perpetual covenant. This is in addition to the instruction given at creation and in the Ten Commandments. It is to be kept holy as a reminder to those called of God that He is the One who sets them apart and that they are the children of God.

When Jesus returns to earth and establishes the Kingdom of God, the Sabbath will be regularly kept as a means of worshiping and serving Him (Isaiah 66:23).

The truth that a Sabbath rest remains for mankind (Hebrews 4:9) is confirmed through the living example of Jesus Christ (Luke 4:31) and His followers after His death and resurrection.

Paul taught the gentiles on the Sabbath (Acts 13:42-44), following both the law of God and the example of Christ. Wherever Paul went he taught on the Sabbath, as was his custom, and established churches that kept the Sabbath (Acts 17:2; 18:4). No example can be found in the writings of the apostles or the practice of the New Testament Church that shows any hint of change in the example and teaching they received from Christ.

In conclusion, the Sabbath looks back to creation and reminds man of his Creator. In the present, it recalls for those who keep the seventh day holy that God is the One who has redeemed them from sin. Finally, the Sabbath looks forward to the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God, when there will be true rest for all humanity (Hebrews 4:4-10).

The Passover

We believe in observing the New Testament Passover on the night of the 14th of Abib, the anniversary of the death of our Savior (Leviticus 23:5; Luke 22:13-14).

That Jesus instituted the new Passover symbols of the bread and the wine, and said of the wine “This is My blood of the new covenant” (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24), clearly shows that the Passover ceremony we are to observe is a New Covenant (New Testament) observance. Also, Jesus personally identifies this *memorial* ceremony (Luke 22:19) as “this Passover” (verse 15) and observed it on the date set aside in Leviticus 23 for annual observance on the 14th of Abib according to the Hebrew calendar.

Jesus Himself set the time of the New Testament Passover service on the night before His death. Paul confirmed that we are to keep it “*on the same night in which He was betrayed*” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Luke 22:14-20; John 13:1-17)—at the beginning of the 14th of Abib. Jesus specifically applied the name “Passover” to this special memorial service (Matthew 26:18; Luke 22:8, 15). He gave His disciples instruction concerning how, when and where they should prepare for this new way of portraying the death of the Messiah (Luke 22:7-13).

The New Testament Passover is not just about the death of the “Lamb of God.” It is also about His suffering (Luke 22:15). We are to remember the entire sacrifice that He made—both His suffering and His death. His suffering, death and burial all occurred on the 14th of Abib. The symbols of the bread and the wine replaced the sacrificial lambs from the Old Testament (Exodus 12), which were a type of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, as the Lamb of God, is “our Passover” (1 Corinthians 5:7). The bread and wine represent His total sacrifice—His suffering and His death.

Jesus’ death occurred on the afternoon of the 14th of Abib, but His suffering began the night before His death while He was still with His disciples. “And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death’” (Matthew 26:37-38).

Our practice for remembering Christ’s death as our Passover at the beginning of the 14th, the night Jesus was betrayed, and keeping the Festival of Unleavened Bread from the beginning of the 15th to the end of the 21st satisfies the directions given in Scripture. The biblical record is plain in this regard, and we have no difficulty discerning the correct sequence of events—Passover is followed by Unleavened Bread.

As Christ is our Passover, the bread and wine are reminders of His suffering and death. As Jews, Jesus Christ and the disciples had observed the Passover throughout their lives. But now there are new symbols. Christ showed His disciples the deep meaning of the Passover through the new symbols and through His ultimate suffering and death on the 14th day of the first month.

After telling His disciples to drink the wine, Jesus said, “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Christ’s instituting the Passover symbols is consistent with His role as “the Mediator of the new covenant” (Hebrews 12:24).

In His sacrifice, He took on Himself the penalty for all mankind’s sins (1 Peter 3:18). When we partake of the bread and wine, we recognize that His body and blood were given to cover our sins. Through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ we are reconciled to the Father. Reconciliation grants us access to the Father, making it possible for us to come boldly before His throne of grace to find help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16). It is because of His sacrifice that we can be healed spiritually, physically, mentally and emotionally (Isaiah 53:4-5, James 5:14).

When we eat the bread, we symbolize Christ living in us (John 6:53-54). We also show our unity with Christ and with each member of the body of Christ—the Church (1 Corinthians 10:16), as well as our willingness to live by the word of God.

Jesus commands us to observe the Passover service in remembrance

of Him (Luke 22:19-20). Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 11:20-26 that the Church is to “come together” to “eat this bread and drink this cup.” The purpose of this ceremony is to “proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes”—representing the only way mankind can be reconciled to God the Father. Paul also tells us that we are only *reconciled* to God the Father by Jesus’ death—that we are *saved* by His life (Romans 5:10).

The foot-washing part of the Passover service was established by Jesus. After first giving us a personal example of being a servant by washing His disciples’ feet, He then told us: “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (John 13:17).

All three elements—the footwashing, the bread and the wine—are a part of the annual ceremony observed by the United Church of God, an International Association. This ceremony is observed only once a year, shortly after sunset on the evening at the beginning of the 14th day of the first month of the Hebrew calendar, as established by the Word of God.

The Festivals of God

We believe in the commanded observance of the seven annual Holy Days that were given to ancient Israel by God; were kept by Jesus Christ, the apostles and the New Testament Church; and will be observed by all mankind during Christ’s millennial reign. These Holy Days reveal God’s plan of salvation (Colossians 2:16-17; 1 Peter 1:19-20; 1 Corinthians 5:8; 15:22-26; 16:8; James 1:18; Exodus 23:14-17; Leviticus 23; Luke 2:41-42; 22:14-15; John 7:2, 8, 10, 14; Acts 2:1; 18:21; 20:16; Zechariah 14:16-21).

When God delivered the nation of Israel from captivity in Egypt, He commanded the nation to participate in special worship during the harvest seasons of the year (Exodus 23:14-16; Deuteronomy 16:1-17).

God defined these celebrations as His festivals, or “the feasts of the LORD” (Leviticus 23:2-4). The gospel message and God’s plan of salvation are enriched by understanding that the physical harvests of food crops are types of the spiritual harvests of humans through God’s gift of salvation by Jesus Christ (Matthew 9:37-38; John 4:35; 15:1-8; Colossians 2:16-17).

The seven annual Holy Days are annual Sabbaths. They are holy convocations, or commanded assemblies, of God’s people. These days are holy because they are sanctified (set apart) by God. He commands His people to assemble for worship and to learn about Him and His plan. His command goes further than worship only; it includes fellowshiping and rejoicing together (Leviticus 23:1-4; Deuteronomy 14:23-26; Nehemiah 8:1-12).

The New Testament record shows the continuity of observance of these days by Jesus Christ and the Church. Jesus observed these festivals, and we as His followers are told to walk as He walked (John 7:8-14; 1 John 2:6). The New Testament Church began on an annual festival—the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). The apostles and disciples of the early Church continued to observe these festivals long after Jesus’ death and resurrection (Acts 18:21; 20:16; 27:9; 1 Corinthians 5:8). Paul upholds their observance and presents them as continuing “shadows” or outlines of the great events in God’s plan of salvation that are yet to be fulfilled (Colossians 2:16-17). He also instructed the congregation in Corinth, “Let us *keep* the feast” (1 Corinthians 5:8).

Through the observance of these feasts, God’s people focus on and are reminded throughout the year of the work of Jesus the Messiah. It is through preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God and the divine calling to a new way of life (John 6:44) that we see the building up of the Church as the family of God. Through Christ as our focal point, we begin to understand the special meaning behind the annual feasts.

During the course of the seven annual festivals are seven Holy Days, which are annual Sabbaths. These Holy Days are the first and last days of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. Although the Passover is a festival, it is not an annual Sabbath.

The plan of salvation as revealed in the Holy Scriptures is pictured in the meaning of these seven annual festivals.

- The **Passover** teaches us that Jesus Christ was sinless and, as the true Lamb of God, gave His life so that the sins of humanity could be forgiven and the death penalty removed (1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:18-20; Romans 3:25). Passover, although not observed as a Holy Day, is the first festival of the year.

- The **Feast of Unleavened Bread** teaches us that we have been called to reject lawlessness and repent of sin. We are to live by every word of God and according to the teachings of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 5:8; Matthew 4:4). During this festival, leaven symbolizes sin and, as such, is removed from our homes for the seven days of the festival (1 Corinthians 5:7-8; Exodus 12:19). By eating unleavened bread we picture living a life of sincerity and truth, free from sin.

- The **Feast of Pentecost**, or firstfruits, teaches us that Jesus Christ came to build His Church. This festival pictures the coming of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the Church. The firstfruits are those who will be given salvation at the return of Christ. They have been empowered with the Holy Spirit, which creates in each one a new heart and nature to live by the commandments of God (Exodus 23:16; Acts 2:1-4, 37-39; 5:32; James 1:18).

- The **Feast of Trumpets** teaches us that Jesus Christ will visibly return to the earth at the end of this age. At that time He will resurrect the saints who are no longer living and instantly change those saints who are still alive to immortal spirit beings (Matthew 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:52-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). This festival commemorates the blowing of the trumpets that will precede His return. Seven angels with seven trumpets are described in Revelation 8-10. Christ will return with the blowing of the seventh trumpet (Revelation 11:15).

- The **Day of Atonement** teaches us that Jesus Christ gave His life to atone for the sins of all mankind. It also points to the time when Satan will be bound for 1,000 years (Leviticus 16:29-30, 20-22; Revelation 20:1-3). This Holy Day pictures our High Priest, Jesus Christ, making atonement for our sins, which allows us to be reconciled to God and enter into the “holiest of all” (Hebrews 9:8-14; 10:19-20). By fasting on this day, we draw closer to God and picture the reconciliation of mankind to God. Christ is essential in this process as our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-15; 5:4-5, 10) and as our eternal sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 9:26-28).

- The **Feast of Tabernacles** teaches us that when Jesus Christ returns,

a new society will be established with Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Christ, assisted by the resurrected saints, will set up His government on the earth for 1,000 years (Revelation 19:11-16; 20:4; Leviticus 23:39-43; Matthew 17:1-4; Hebrews 11:8-9). Rule under His laws will spread from Jerusalem throughout the world to usher in an unprecedented period of peace and prosperity (Isaiah 2:2-4; Daniel 2:35, 44; 7:13-14).

• **The Last Great Day**, or eighth day, teaches us that Jesus Christ will complete His harvest of humans by raising from the dead and extending salvation to all human beings who have died in the past and have never been given a full opportunity for salvation (Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 11:25-27; Luke 11:31-32; Revelation 20:11-13).

The annual cycle of the celebration of the festivals and Holy Days reminds Christ's disciples that He is working out His plan of extending salvation from sin and death and offering the gift of eternal life in the family of God to all humanity—past, present and future.

God's Food Laws

We believe that those meats that are designated "unclean" by God in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are not to be eaten.

Scripture reveals that God created the vast array of animal life that inhabits our planet and further states that some animals were created for the specific purpose of providing food for mankind (1 Timothy 4:3). Although a Christian is not obligated to eat any meats, vegetarianism in its various forms, if practiced as a matter of religious requirement, is considered to be a spiritual weakness (Romans 14:2).

There is no clear statement as to when God first revealed the difference between those animals that are designated "clean" and those that are not.

The absence of a clear command on this matter should not be taken as proof that no instruction was given. There are few clear commands in the early pages of the Bible, but the examples that are recorded reveal that standards of right and wrong were clearly understood. For example, there is no clear command against murder before Cain's murder of his brother, Abel, but no one would conclude that murder was therefore acceptable before this point. The book of Genesis can be described as a book of beginnings. This book was written by Moses to provide a historical record of what took place, not as a book of laws. Readers should not assume that the law has not been in existence from the beginning.

The first statement in Scripture concerning "clean" and "unclean" animals is found in Genesis 7:2, where Noah is commanded to take seven (or seven pairs of) clean animals and only one pair of unclean animals. When God told Noah to build a giant ark, He gave explicit instructions on its size, composition and design, yet God saw no need to instruct Noah about which creatures were clean and which were unclean. God's instruction and Noah's response clearly indicate that Noah understood which creatures were clean and which were not.

At the conclusion of the great flood, God told Noah: "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs" (Genesis 9:3). The point being made in the preceding verse is that, even though there were few men left alive, and large and dangerous animals had been preserved, Noah and his family had no need to fear these animals.

Verse 3 shows that the animals were to be for man's benefit. They were given into man's control in the same way the green plants were given. Some green plants are suitable for food, some are suitable for building materials, some are for beautification and enjoyment, and some are poisonous and can sicken and bring death when ingested. In the same way, some animals are useful for providing food, while others provide fibers for clothing, strength for working the land or protection from dangers.

Whenever animals are mentioned in Scripture as a food source or in connection with sacrifice before Mount Sinai, they are invariably clean animals (Genesis 15:9—cow, goat, sheep, dove and pigeon; Genesis 22:13—sheep; Exodus 12:5—sheep or goat). The law of clean and unclean meats clearly predates the Old Covenant, regardless of what role they may have played within that covenant.

When the Levitical system was established, it was necessary to codify a number of matters that had already been in effect for some time. Two passages of Scripture, Leviticus 11:1-47 and Deuteronomy 14:3-21, make clear which creatures are set apart as suitable for food and which are not, though these passages merely codify practices that long antedated the Levitical system. The term used to designate those animals whose flesh is acceptable for food is *clean*, while the term used for those that are not suitable for food is *unclean*.

Scripture does not reveal exactly why God designated certain animal flesh as suitable for food while other flesh was not acceptable. Whatever the reasons, God knows why and how He created each animal, and He designates certain substances as good for food and others as unacceptable.

Various passages in the New Testament indicate that the laws of clean and unclean meats were still being observed by Jesus Christ and His followers. As eager as the religious leaders were to accuse Jesus of violating their interpretations of religious law, there is no record that they ever confronted Him about His teachings or practices on this matter. Had He advocated eating unclean meats, it would have been an ideal way to besmirch His reputation with the masses, since they would have been appalled at such an idea. Jesus' words in the oft-misquoted passage in Mark 7 would have outraged the religious leaders, had they interpreted His statement the way many people try to explain it today. The use of Mark 7 as a basis for eating unclean meats is founded on a different use of grammar that is found in only a few of the Greek manuscripts.

Acts 10 powerfully illustrates the early New Testament Church's understanding about clean and unclean meats, although this is not the primary purpose behind the vision. Peter received a vision from God that instructed him to take the gospel message to the nations and peoples outside the Jewish community. During this vision, Peter three times refused to partake of the unclean animals shown him and remained puzzled about the meaning of the vision until God revealed that it was about people and not about clean and unclean animals. It was revealed to Peter that no man should be considered "common or unclean" (verses 28-29).

This chapter ends with the Holy Spirit being given to the household of Cornelius as proof that the gospel was now going to all nations (verses 44-48). Although this section of Scripture has been used as per-

mission to eat unclean animals, it clearly indicates the opposite. This event took place several years into the history of the New Testament Church, yet Peter rejected the idea of eating unclean meat, even going so far as protesting that he had "never eaten anything that is common or unclean" (verse 14).

Paul wrote of creatures "which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" and described these creatures as "sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (1 Timothy 4:3, 5). The word used to describe these creatures, *sanctified*, carries the dual connotation of being set apart *from* something as well as being set apart *for* something. The clean animals are those that have clearly been set apart by the Word of God from all other animals and can be used for man's nourishment. The flesh of those creatures that are designated as suitable for food is to be received thankfully by those who believe and know the truth.

Therefore, the United Church of God teaches abstinence from unclean meats based on the above-stated instructions and examples.

Military Service and War

We believe that Christians are forbidden by the commandments of God from taking human life directly or indirectly and that bearing arms is contrary to this fundamental belief. Therefore, we believe that Christians should not voluntarily become engaged in military service. If they are involuntarily engaged in military service, we believe they should refuse conscientiously to bear arms and, to the extent possible, refuse to come under military authority (Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:21-22; 1 Corinthians 7:21-23; Acts 5:29).

The way of God is the way of love, sacrifice and sharing (Romans 12:1, 10). The teaching of God for an individual regarding the taking of human life is summed up in the Sixth Commandment, which says, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Christ repeated a great principle when He said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). Paul said, "Love does no harm to a neighbor" (Romans 13:10).

Jesus stated, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight . . ." (John 18:36). The spiritual Israel of God is no longer composed of the 12 physical tribes. People from all nations have been grafted into spiritual Israel (Romans 9:1-8) and are a part of the spiritual Body of Christ (Romans 2:25-29). As Christians, we have come out of darkness, from the power of Satan to the power of the Kingdom of God (Acts 26:28; Colossians 1:11-13).

We now have our citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20). We are to emulate the actions of Jesus (1 Peter 4:1, 13-16). Christ did not respond in kind when He was reviled, and He did not threaten when He suffered. He suffered for doing good and endured suffering patiently because of His desire to please God (1 Peter 2:19-24). He taught that to be angry with our brother can result in sin (Matthew 5:21-22). We are to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us (verses 43-44). We are not to avenge ourselves; vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19).

Our warfare as Christians is in the spiritual arena (Ephesians 6:10-20). We do not war against flesh (2 Corinthians 10:3), but against wicked spirits in high places (Ephesians 6:12). We are to be good spiritual soldiers of Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:3-4). This is our calling in life. As such, a Christian must at times face a conflict between man's laws and the laws of Almighty God. When that happens, the Christian must obey the laws of God (Acts 5:29; 1 Peter 2:13-14).

In most countries, the military has its own rules and regulations. A person in the military is not free to decide what he or she can do. The wisest course of action is to refrain from putting oneself in such a position, since a person in the military is subject to its authority and may be called upon to take human life. The apostle Paul tells us not to become slaves of men (1 Corinthians 7:23).

Therefore, the United Church of God, an International Association, supports the conscientious objection of its members toward military service and war.

Promises to Abraham

We believe in God's enduring righteousness. That righteousness is demonstrated by God's faithfulness in fulfilling all the promises He made to the father of the faithful, Abraham. As promised, God multiplied Abraham's lineal descendants so that Abraham literally became the "father" of many nations. We believe that God, as promised, materially prospered Abraham's lineal descendants Isaac and Jacob (whose name He later changed to Israel). We believe that God, through Abraham's Seed, Jesus Christ, is making salvation available to all humanity regardless of physical lineage. Salvation is not, therefore, a right of birth. It is freely open to all whom God calls, and those who are regarded as descendants of Abraham are those of the faith, heirs according to the promises. We believe that the knowledge that God has fulfilled and continues to fulfill the physical promises made to Abraham and his children, and that He is fulfilling the spiritual promise through Jesus Christ, is critical to understanding the message of the prophets and its application to the world (Psalm 111:1-10; Romans 4:16; 9:7-8; Galatians 3:16; Genesis 32:28).

God made physical and spiritual promises to Abraham. The physical promises involved physical greatness for his descendants: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great" (Genesis 12:1-2). These physical promises contained assurances of land or territory and other blessings (Genesis 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:18).

These physical promises were formally passed on to Abraham's descendants. First they were passed on to Isaac (Genesis 26:1-4). Next

they went to Jacob (Genesis 28:3-4, 13-14). Then they were passed on to Joseph and finally to Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:15-19). But, because of the enslavement of Israel, the fulfillment of these physical promises was delayed.

Before any of Abraham's early descendants inherited the land of promise, they became slaves in Egypt (Exodus 1:7-11). Israel groaned because of its bondage, and God heard. In His faithfulness, God determined to deliver Israel from bondage to keep His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that Abraham's descendants would be physically blessed by becoming a great people on the earth (Exodus 2:23-25; 6:7-8; 13:5; Deuteronomy 9:4-6).

Next we find promises of physical blessings being offered to Israel. Only if the Israelites would obey God and keep the covenant would they receive these blessings. If they would not obey the covenant's terms, the blessings would be withheld and curses come in their place (Exodus 19:5-6; Leviticus 26:3-39; Deuteronomy 28:1-68).

Because of Israel's and Judah's sins, the blessings were withheld. There were only brief periods of greatness under a few righteous kings. But, because of God's faithfulness, He eventually would bless Abraham's descendants with greatness. The descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh (Great Britain and the United States) have received the blessing of ascendance to national greatness. Ephraim has become a company of nations, and Manasseh has become a great nation. It is through these two that the prophecies of the Bible concerning Israel are being fulfilled (Genesis 48:16; 49:22-26).

Contained in the promises to Abraham was the promise of salvation to all men who would become Abraham's seed (his descendants). Through Abraham all families of the earth were to have access to God's blessings (Genesis 12:3). God confirmed the promises to Abraham because he obeyed God's commandments (Genesis 22:18).

These promises to Abraham were not limited to the physical, but included spiritual blessings extended to all mankind. Paul understood that salvation was not just for Jews or Israelites, but for all humanity. He was shown that the "Seed" being referred to was Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:8, 14-16).

Zacharias, at the birth of John the Baptist, prophesied that God would remember the oath that He had sworn to Abraham (Luke 1:69-72). Paul

records that Jesus Christ came to confirm the promises made to the fathers (Romans 15:8). The promise of salvation comes from God through the Holy Spirit as a part of the New Covenant made available to us through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit is **the key** to the "better promises" that come under the "new" and "better" covenant that was established on those better promises (Hebrews 8:6).

The apostles were told to wait at Jerusalem for this better promise (Acts 1:4, 8). They waited to receive the seal of the Holy Spirit "of promise," which was the guarantee of their inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14). It is by God's Spirit that we can know that we are the children of God (Romans 8:9, 14-17) and thus Abraham's seed (spiritually) and heirs of salvation according to the promise (Galatians 3:28). This promise is not based on race, but on God's calling and individual repentance, regardless of race or national origin.

God's Purpose for Mankind

We believe God's purpose for mankind is to prepare those whom He calls—and who elect through a life of overcoming sin, developing righteous character and growing in grace and knowledge—to possess God's Kingdom and become kings and priests reigning with Christ at His return. We believe that the reason for mankind's existence is literally to be born as spirit beings into the family of God (Romans 6:15-16; 8:14-17, 30; Acts 2:39; 2 Peter 3:18; Revelation 3:5; 5:10).

It is God's desire that all humans become members of His family in

the Kingdom of God (2 Peter 3:9). As part of this process, God is now calling some individuals to inherit eternal life at the return of Jesus Christ to earth (1 Corinthians 1:26-28; Matthew 20:16; John 6:44, 65), with others to be called later. Those being chosen now will accept Christ as their Savior, surrender their wills to God's will and strive to overcome sin in their lives (Revelation 3:21).

Jesus Christ is referred to as "the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:14-17, 29; Revelation 1:5-6; Colossians 1:15-18). In the resurrection at Christ's return, "we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him . . ." (1 John 3:2). At that time, those who have died in the faith will be resurrected, and those who are alive in the faith will be changed. Both will become spirit beings and members of the family of God (2 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Corinthians 15:42-53). They will then serve with Christ on the earth as kings and priests during His millennial rule (Revelation 5:10; 20:4).

King and *priest* are both offices held by Christ. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Revelation 19:15-16). He is also our High Priest (Hebrews 3:1; 4:14-16; 5:5-6; 6:20; 7:24-28; 8:1-6; 9:11; 10:12). Others will share in His responsibilities, also as kings and priests, serving under Him to carry out the Father's will (Revelation 5:10).

Those who will become priests in the Millennium will be responsible for teaching people to discern between "the unclean and the clean," a phrase which includes the concept of helping them discern good from evil (Ezekiel 22:26; 44:23-24). As messengers from God, they will teach the law of God and make known its meaning and application (Malachi 2:7-9).

One of the responsibilities of a king in the Old Testament was to write the words of God's law and "read it all the days of his life" so he would carefully observe it and not turn aside from it (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). Those who are made kings and priests in the Kingdom of God will be those who have allowed God to write His laws in their hearts and minds while they are still human beings (Hebrews 8:10-11; Jeremiah 31:33).

As kings during the Millennium, they will teach God's way of life to humans still living (Isaiah 30:20-21). They will administer God's government in those areas in which Jesus Christ will give them responsibilities (Matthew 19:27-28; Luke 19:11-19). They will be completely

subject to Christ's will, just as He is completely subject to the Father's will (John 5:30). As joint heirs with Christ, they will assist Him in teaching and governing mortals on the earth (Revelation 5:10).

God's great plan encompasses all mankind. The Great White Throne Judgment, described in Revelation 20:11-13, reveals that all human beings who have died without ever understanding that great plan will be resurrected and have their true destiny revealed to them. God's plan is comprehensive. All humanity will enjoy the opportunity to learn God's truth and come to repentance (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). This will be during the time beyond the Millennium when the vast majority of human beings will be raised from the dead to receive their opportunity for salvation. Those who repent and accept Christ as their Savior will receive the gift of everlasting life in the family of God, finally achieving their God-given destiny.

The Church

We believe that the Church is that body of believers who have received, and are being led by, the Holy Spirit. The true Church of God is a spiritual organism. Its biblical name is "the Church of God." We believe that the mission of the Church is to preach the gospel (good news) of the coming Kingdom of God to all nations as a witness, and to help reconcile to God such people as are now being called. We believe that it is also the mission of the Church of God to strengthen, edify and nurture the children of God in the love and admonition of our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38-39, 47; 20:28; Romans 8:14; 14:19; Ephesians 1:22-23; 3:14; 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 11:16, 22; 12:27; 14:26; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1-2; 5:18-20; Galatians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Timothy 3:5, 15; Mark 16:15; Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20; John 6:44, 65; 17:11, 16).

The word *church* is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which is derived from the verb *kaleo* (meaning “to call”) and with the prefix *ek* (a preposition meaning “out of”). It means a body of people who have been “called out of,” just as Israel was called out of Egypt to assemble before God (Acts 7:38). In the first New Testament occurrence of *ekklesia*, Jesus promised to “build [His] church.” It is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the minds of the members (1 Corinthians 2:12-13; Ephesians 4:3-6) that identifies the Church of God as a unique assembly of people.

The Church of God began on the Day of Pentecost after the ascension of Jesus Christ. God poured out His Spirit on the disciples who were assembled together on that day in obedience to Christ’s command to remain in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49; Acts 2:1-4; Acts 5:32). Over the next several days, God “added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

Jesus said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44) and unless “it has been granted” by the Father (verse 65). Therefore, no one can “join” the Church. Rather, God initiates the process by leading a person to repentance and baptism for the remission of sins and giving the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), through which a person is placed into the Church.

Since it is the indwelling presence of God’s Spirit that identifies and unifies God’s people (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), the Church is a spiritual organism. Ephesians 2:19-22 describes the Church as a “holy temple.” Each individual member is also a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Jesus Christ is the living Head of the Church, which is often described as “the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:12; Colossians 1:18). The Bible refers to the entire Body of Christ or an individual congregation as “the church of God,” or “churches of God” when referring to more than one congregation.

Jesus has commissioned His disciples to preach the gospel to the world (Mark 16:15) and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). Christ calls us out of the evils of this world (John 17:15-16) and sets us apart by the truth of the Word of God (verse 17). He also sends us into the world (verse 18) to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God for a witness (Matthew 24:14).

The preaching work of the Church, coupled with the combined

testimony of individual lives of Church members, provides a powerful message of hope and illumination to a darkened world (Philippians 2:15; Matthew 5:14-16). Members of God’s Church are His “special people” (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9), transformed by the renewing of their minds through the power of God’s Holy Spirit (Romans 12:2).

The Church also provides a haven for fellowship (Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:7), encouragement (Hebrews 3:13; 10:24) and spiritual nourishment (Ephesians 5:29; Colossians 2:19). God has given spiritual gifts to every member for the edification of the body (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-28; Ephesians 4:7-8, 11-16). These gifts are to be exercised with love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Loving one another establishes members’ credibility as disciples of Jesus Christ (John 13:34-35).

The biblical name for the Church is shown to be “Church of God.” On 12 occasions in the New Testament the term *Church of God* is used to identify the spiritual organism identified as God’s people, spiritual Israel. The precedent for using descriptive phrases along with the name “Church of God” is clearly established in Scripture. We read of the “church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1), “the churches of Galatia” (Galatians 1:2), and the “church in Cenchrea” (Romans 16:1).

Jesus promised that His Church would never die (Matthew 16:18) and that He would never leave nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He promised to be with His people “even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20), empowering them to do His work. When Christ returns to this earth to establish the kingdom of God, His Church will rule with Him (Revelation 2:26; 3:21; 5:10; Daniel 7:22, 26-27), having become teachers and judges (1 Corinthians 6:1-3).

Tithing

We believe in tithing as a way of honoring God with our substance and as a means of serving Him in the preaching of the gospel, the care of the Church, attending the festivals and helping the needy (Proverbs 3:9-10; Genesis 14:17-20; 1 Corinthians 9:7-14; Numbers 18:21; Deuteronomy 14:22-29).

To “tithing” (meaning in both Hebrew and Greek “to give or take the tenth of”) means to give a tenth of “all the increase” (Deuteronomy 14:22) derived from one’s produce, property, or income, for the support of a religious purpose. The motivation to tithe is a worshipful recognition of God as the Creator and Possessor of the earth and everything in it, including ourselves.

Although tithing became a codified, or written, law under the covenant God made with Israel, it was historically practiced among those who were faithful to God before that covenant. Abraham, after his defeat of the four kings, tithed on the spoils of the war to Melchizedek, priest of God Most High (Genesis 14:18-22). Abraham obviously understood giving a tenth as the appropriate way to honor God with one’s physical possessions. It is also noteworthy that Abraham gave the tenth to Melchizedek, a representative of the Creator God.

Abraham recognized the underlying premise for giving a tithe to God: He is the actual “Possessor of heaven and earth” who made his victory, and all blessings, possible. God reminds us throughout the Bible, and people of God respectfully acknowledge, that everything belongs to God (Exodus 19:5; Job 41:11; Psalm 24:1; 50:12; Haggai 2:8). “And you shall remember the LORD your God,” Moses told Israel,

“for it is He who gives you power to get wealth . . .” (Deuteronomy 8:18). Tithing is thus, first and foremost, an act of worshipful recognition of God as our source of existence, blessing and providence.

Jacob also followed the example of his grandfather Abraham. When God reconfirmed to him the promises He had made to Abraham, Jacob promised God, “Of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth [tithe] to You” (Genesis 28:20-22).

The practice of tithing was later incorporated into the covenant with Israel as a written law. The tribe of Levi, which was not given an inheritance of land from which Levites could derive increase (Numbers 18:23), was to receive the tithe of the agricultural produce in return for their ecclesiastical service to the nation. The Levites, based on what they had received in tithes from the people, in turn tithed to the priestly family of Aaron (verses 18:26-28).

As time passed, the tithe was carelessly neglected in postexilic Judah, for which God corrected the nation in the strongest of terms (Malachi 3:8-10). Failure to tithe, God said, was tantamount to robbing Him, and the people were consequently cursed. Yet He also promised that renewed obedience in tithing would result in blessings from Him so abundant that “there [would] not be room enough to receive it.”

Some centuries later, Jesus Himself clearly upheld the practice of tithing. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. *These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone*” (Matthew 23:23).

Rather than seizing a golden opportunity to abrogate the practice of tithing, Christ plainly confirmed His will that tithing should indeed be practiced, along with sincere adherence to other “weightier [spiritual] matters” they were obviously neglecting.

As tithes and offerings in Israel were given to the tribe of Levi for their livelihood and service to God, the Church in the New Testament provided financial support for the ministry to carry on their work. Instances of, and principles relating to, this practice are found in Luke 10:1, 7-8; 1 Corinthians 9:7-14; 2 Corinthians 11:7-9; Philippians 4:14-18 and Hebrews 7.

From Deuteronomy 14, we can identify two other purposes for tithing—attending God’s festivals (Leviticus 23; Deuteronomy 14:22-27)

and caring for the poor and needy (verses 28-29). Since we believe in observing God's festivals and we believe in taking care of the poor and needy, we acknowledge the continuity of this practice.

Today the United Church of God continues the teaching that tithing is a universal law and that one's willing obedience to this law reflects the unselfish, giving nature of our Creator and Provider.

Concerning administration of this law, it is the duty of the Church to teach people to tithe, but it is the responsibility of the individual to obey. Tithing is a personal matter of faith between the individual and his Creator. We teach that anyone devoted to following God should obey Him in this fundamental way, but it is not appointed to the Church to enforce and regulate tithe-paying. Because of the economic complexities in today's societies, the Church regularly receives many technical questions about tithing, and we seek to render wise administrative guidelines according to God's will and direction.

Through tithing that springs from willing and cheerful giving (2 Corinthians 9:6-8), we both honor God and support the physical means for doing His work: preaching the gospel to the world and making disciples of all the nations (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20). He has provided the perfect financial system, which takes care of the needs of His work, the personal need to attend His festivals, and the need to care for the poor.

The Resurrections

We believe that the only hope of eternal life for mortal humans lies in the resurrection through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We believe that at the return of Jesus Christ a resurrection to spirit life will take place for all who have been God's faithful servants. We believe that, after Jesus Christ has ruled on earth for 1,000 years, there will be a resurrection to physical life of the vast majority of all people who have ever lived. We believe

that, after these people have had an opportunity to live a physical life, if they become converted they, too, will receive eternal life. We also believe that those who reject God's offer of salvation will reap eternal death (1 Corinthians 15:19, 42-52; Acts 23:6; John 5:21-29; Romans 6:23; 8:10-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Revelation 20:4-5, 11-15; John 3:16; Matthew 25:46).

The resurrection of the dead is one of the fundamental doctrines leading to perfection and eternal life (Hebrews 6:1-2). Without the resurrection of the dead, Christ would not be risen and our faith would be in vain (1 Corinthians 15:12-19). Humans are mortal, with no inherent immortality. Furthermore, man is incapable of giving himself eternal life; thus the need for a resurrection.

We find in 1 Corinthians 15 that the resurrection is the hope of all mankind. *Resurrection* means a raising up or rising. Biblically, it refers to the raising of the dead to life again. The Scriptures teach the resurrection of "all who are in the graves" (John 5:28), but there is an order in which all the dead will be resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:23). The Bible reveals that some will be resurrected to everlasting life and others are to be sentenced to eternal death (Daniel 12:2-3; Revelation 20:13-15).

Resurrections are possible because God has the ability to give life. God, through the Word, who became Jesus Christ, gave life to the first man, Adam. He has the same power to give life to a human being a second time. Both the Father and the Son have life within themselves (John 5:26). This inherent power of God can produce both physical and spirit life. God has power to resurrect one from the grave in physical or spirit form (1 Corinthians 15:35-38). God has proven He has the power to resurrect to physical life (John 11:43-44; Matthew 27:52-53) and to spiritual life (Matthew 28:6-7). Resurrections are also possible because Christ has been raised (1 Corinthians 15:20-22). His resurrection as a living Savior made possible the salvation of all people; hence, their resurrections. Mankind would die and perish forever were it not for Christ's resurrection (Romans 5:10; 1 Corinthians 15:26, 55).

God's plan for mankind's salvation requires the resurrection of all who die (John 5:28). The apostle John describes three resurrections—one to eternal life (Revelation 20:4-6); one to physical life (verses 11-12); and one to death in the lake of fire (verses 13-15 [although these verses do

not mention a resurrection specifically, the incorrigibly wicked, who have rejected God's offer for salvation, will need to be resurrected to be cast into the lake of fire]). John 5:29 is another important verse in understanding God's plan. There are two resurrections mentioned in this verse, but the Bible actually refers to three resurrections.

The **first resurrection** is called by that name: ". . . They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years . . . Blessed and holy is he who has part in the *first resurrection*. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4-6). This resurrection will take place at the second coming of Christ when the righteous dead will be resurrected to immortality (1 Corinthians 15:50-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17). This is called a "better resurrection" (Hebrews 11:35) because it is to immortality and rulership with Christ during the Millennium.

The **second resurrection** will take place at the end of the 1,000-year reign of Christ and the saints. "But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished" (Revelation 20:5). This resurrection is further described in verse 12: "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books."

This is a resurrection back to physical life (Ezekiel 37:1-14). It will include the vast majority of all people who have ever lived—people who never knew God and His great purpose for them. It will be an exciting time when virtually all of history comes back to life (Matthew 11:20-24; 12:41-42). These people will have a second chance for physical life but their first opportunity for salvation and glorious immortality in God's family. They will be given ample time for learning and growing in God's way of life. Truly, God's plan includes everyone. He is not willing for any to perish but that all should come to repentance and salvation (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4).

The **third resurrection** will take place at the conclusion of God's plan for mankind. This will be a resurrection to physical life for all those who have rejected God's offer of eternal life in past ages—a resurrection to death in the lake of fire. "And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14-15; Hebrews 10:26-29; 2 Peter 3:10-12). Our loving God gives every-

one an opportunity to have eternal life and wishes no one to perish. But if they refuse, the punishment is the second death, which ends their lives quickly and forever (Malachi 4:1, 3; Matthew 25:46).

The three resurrections reveal the order of God's marvelous plan and purpose for all of humanity. It is appointed to man once to die (Hebrews 9:27), but afterward there will be a resurrection for everyone who has ever lived.

Jesus Christ's Return

We believe in the personal, visible, premillennial return of the Lord Jesus Christ to rule the nations on earth as King of Kings and to continue His priestly office as Lord of Lords. At that time, He will sit upon the throne of David. During His 1,000-year reign on the earth, He will restore all things and establish the Kingdom of God forever (Matthew 24:30, 44; Revelation 1:7; 11:15; 19:16; 20:4-6; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16; John 14:3; Isaiah 9:7; 40:10-12; Hebrews 7:24; Jeremiah 23:5; Luke 1:32-33; Acts 1:11; 3:21; 15:16; Daniel 7:14, 18, 27).

"I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3).

The return of Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords is a truth frequently reaffirmed in the Bible. It is a reality to the believer of the Holy Scriptures, as written in the Old Testament and the New Testament (Matthew 24:30; Acts 1:11; Revelation 1:7; 19:16; Isaiah 40:10; Daniel 2:44; Micah 1:3).

Therefore, we fully believe in the personal, visible, premillennial (before the 1,000-year reign of Christ) return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

His return will not be done in secret (Matthew 24:30; Revelation 1:7). “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). He will make war with the kings of the earth, and overcome them (Revelation 17:14) to bring peace.

“Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand” (Joel 2:1). “He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses (Revelation 19:13-14). And He said, “‘Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.’ So rend your heart, and not your garments” (Joel 2:12-13); “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

He will sit on the throne of His father (ancestor) David (Luke 1:32; Isaiah 9:7; Jeremiah 23:5) and establish the Kingdom of God on earth forever (Revelation 11:15). During the first 1,000 years of this reign, Christ will inaugurate a refreshing time, a time of restoration of all things (Acts 3:19, 21). He will be assisted by the saints resurrected as He returns. They will become immortal children of God (1 Corinthians 15:50-53), rise to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17) and join Him as conqueror of earth’s rebellious nations and in establishing the Kingdom of God (Revelation 5:10; 20:6), the wonderful world tomorrow (Amos 9:13-14; Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-5).

Jesus Christ came once to bear the sins of many and, as promised, will appear a second time (Hebrews 9:28; Acts 15:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:23). The kingdoms of this world will become “the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever” (Revelations 11:15), and “the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever” (Daniel 7:18), with Him.

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Revelation 22:12). Yes, Jesus Christ is returning. The King is coming!